University of Alberta

Instigating Change: Investigating the meaning(s) of religious objects in St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art

by

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Abstract

Opened in 1993, St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art is a project of Glasgow Museums. St Mungo Museum is a museum of religion, serving its community through its display of religious objects. Museum organizers hope that by highlighting the religions practiced in the city, and by demonstrating the impact of religion on the people of Glasgow, greater understanding of Glasgow's cultural diversity is achievable. This thesis explores the exhibition practice used in the museum, focusing on how display influences our reading of the religious object. It also explores the tension existing between the secular museum space and the sacred nature of religious objects. Finally, it examines how the museum integrates community into its project by providing opportunities to dialogue with the museum, while also using community to authenticate the museum's actions.

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Introduction

St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art, found on the edge of Glasgow's East End, is unique in its approach to its subject matter—it is not a museum of art, of ethnography, or natural history; rather, it is a museum of religion. It is composed of a large collection of religious objects, primarily taken from the Burrell Collection—one of 13 museums operated by Glasgow Museums—and from Glasgow Museums' collections in storage. These objects are used to showcase the material culture associated with world religions, investigating the role that religion plays in Scottish life. These objects are displayed in the museum's three permanent galleries, which are organized by specific themes and viewpoints.

Apart from the experiment of Rudolf Otto, Professor of Theology at the University of Marburg, Germany, who opened a museum of religion as part of the university in 1927, St Mungo Museum is the first museum of its kind to open its doors to the public.[1] Founded in 1991, and opened in 1993, St Mungo Museum operates under the umbrella of Glasgow Museums and is a civic museum.[2]

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[1] Otto's museum project, the *Religionskundliche Sammlung der Philipps-Universitat Marburg*, collected objects "in order to perceive the spirit of religion and the spirit of individual religions and compare them." From Mark O'Neill's "Making Histories of Religion," *Making Histories in Museums*, Gaynor Kavanagh, ed. (London and New York: Leicester University Press, 1996), 188-199. Otto's museum is still in operation today, and is a useful resource for students studying religion. Its website can be found at www.uni-marburg.de/relsanm/welcome.html. Also see Crispin Paine "Museums and Religion," *Encyclopedia of Religion, Second Edition* (Farmington Hills: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005) for further discussion on these and other museums of religion. Since the conception of St Mungo Museum, other museums of this type have emerged: The Musée des Religions in Nicolet, Quebec (hosts temporary exhibitions), and the World Religions Museum in Taiwan, are two examples. See O'Neill's article for further discussion of these institutions. The Museum of Intolerance is currently being planned to open in Jerusalem.

[2] Glasgow Museums is a department of Culture and Leisure Services, a division of the City of Glasgow, which took over management of museums and art galleries in 1999. Glasgow Museums is currently made up of thirteen city museums: the Burrell Collection, Fossil Grove, Gallery of Modern

Consequently, Glasgow Museums hires staff members whose versatility allows them to work as needed in any of the city's museums. The administration of all the city's museums reflects the bureaucracy of Glasgow Museums' civic ties. Accordingly, St Mungo Museum, and all other Glasgow Museums, must seek the city's approval when making major decisions. This political structure affects the financial resources available to the museum, the number of staff on hand, and the accessibility of objects and artifacts.

Two factors contributed to the formation of St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art within the city of Glasgow. The first relates to the location of the museum: St Mungo Museum stands in the shadow of the twelfth century Glasgow Cathedral, which is home to the bones of Glasgow's patron saint, Mungo, (also called Kentigern), who died in 603. To celebrate the Cathedral's significance, the Friends of Glasgow Cathedral designed a visitor centre adjacent to the Cathedral.[3] Unfortunately, in 1991, after construction had already begun on the building, the Friends found themselves without the financial resources to complete the project. The city of Glasgow assisted the Friends by purchasing the building in 1991 (figure 1). Recognizing the potential of the building as a new museum space, Glasgow Museums quickly put forward a proposal to the city to turn the visitor centre into a museum of religion. Glasgow Museums argued that a museum of religion was an ideal tenant for the visitor centre, given its proximity to the Cathedral, and the

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Art, Glasgow Museums Resource Centre, the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, Martyrs' School, McLellan Art Gallery, The Museum of Transport, The People's Palace and Winter Garden, Pollock House, The Provand's Lordship, Scotland Street School Museum, and St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art. All Glasgow Museums offer free admission. Information on these museums can be obtained from Glasgow Museum's website: www.glasgowmuseums.com.

[3] Despite a number of inquiries into the date that the Friends began their project, I still do not know this information.

Necropolis, the historic burial grounds for the city's merchant class. Furthermore, the building sits on land once occupied by the Bishop's Palace (figures 2 and 3).[4]

When Glasgow Museums gained access to the building, the exterior was complete, as well as its main interior framework. Consequently, the museum's architecture resembles that of the Cathedral. The stained glass windows, from Glasgow Museums' Burrell Collection, that now glimmer from pointed arch windows in the Gallery of Religious Art, heighten this visual comparison as do the lampposts surrounding the museum, whose fish crest represents St Mungo (figures 3 and 4). In recognition of their contribution to the building, the basement of St Mungo Museum now serves as a meeting place for the Friends of Glasgow Cathedral.

The vacancy of the visitor centre was one influential factor in the city of Glasgow's decision to create St Mungo Museum; religious conflict within the city also motivated councilors to explore different approaches to resolving religious tension. Councilors perceived that financing a museum that examines Scotland's religious communities would be one tangible step in assisting Glaswegians to broaden their conceptions of religion. Curatorial staff at St Mungo Museum envisioned that object-led displays would foster discussion and understanding of the multi-faith character of Glasgow.[5]

Beginning with the church where he is now buried, St Mungo founded the city of Glasgow in the seventh century. The city remained grounded in its Catholic faith until 1603, when Mary Queen of Scots' son James came to the throne under the

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[4] Antonia Lovelace, "A Broad Perspective," from "St Mungo's Museum of Religious Life and Art: A New Development in Glasgow," *Journal of Museum Ethnography*, no. 7 (1995): 63-78.
[5] See Mark O'Neill, "Serious Earth" *Museum Journal* (February 1994): 28.

banner of Protestantism. With the industrial boom of the nineteenth century, the working class grew, drawing immigrants of differing faiths to the city, leading to decreased attendance in Protestant churches.[6] Continued immigration has further changed the face of Glasgow. Today you find a number of Glaswegians from India, Pakistan, and China, altering the religious climate further, transforming religious conflict from one isolated by fracturing Christian sects, to one involving a multi-faith dimension. The traditional discord between Protestant and Catholic has not disappeared, however, as is dramatically visible at city football matches featuring the (Catholic) Celtic team or the (Protestant) Rangers.[7]

Recognizing the serious nature of religious issues in the city, Glasgow Museums opened St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art with the hope that the museum "will encourage mutual respect and understanding among people of different faiths and none" (Mandate, 1993). Three strategies were proposed to achieve this goal: the first is the examination of religious art in an attempt to demonstrate how religious art production is shared by many faiths. The next is to use religious objects in a way that highlights their connection to ritual, and thereby to religious life, and the final is a study of the history of religion in Glasgow. These three themes now constitute the main galleries of the museum: the Gallery of Religious Art, which is

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[6] Glasgow was referred to as the 'Second City of the Empire' based upon its booming economy, as the city benefited from its shipping industry. Tobacco, shipped in from England's colonies, was brought to the port in Glasgow, greatly profiting the city's merchants. Other industries, such as steel, coal, and cotton enriched the merchant class. See Katie Grant "God and the City" from *The Scotsman* (Monday 29 April 2002).

[7] Information is based upon an interview with Kiran Singh, Education and Access Curator at St Mungo Museum on 23 May 2005 and with members of the Glasgow Police, on 22 May 2005. See also, "Scotland, Sectarianism, and the Irish diaspora," *Frontline* 4 <www.redflag.org.uk/frontline/four/04sectar.html>, and "Can football eradicate sectarianism? *The Scotsman* (Friday 15 April 2005) <http://news.scotsman.com>.

the first gallery accessed during the museum visit, the Gallery of Religious Life, which is only accessible through the Gallery of Religious Art, and the Scottish Gallery, which is located on the third floor of the museum and is adjacent to the museum's education room. These three galleries are supplied with objects from Glasgow Museums' collection and have not been updated since the museum opened in 1993. A temporary exhibition space used to showcase exhibitions organized by staff, members of the community, or guest curators completes the museum. Community members actively participated in the construction of these galleries and supplied the museum with needed objects and statements of belief.

Also woven into St Mungo Museum is an examination of the six major world religions: Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism. Although other faiths, such as Bahá'i, paganism, Wicca, and tribal religions creep into thematic display cases in the Gallery of Religious Life and are represented in the Gallery of Religious Art, the museum's focus on religion sits within the framework of the six major world religions, in the museum's effort to simplify the examination of faith. The museum highlights the six major world religions by providing information on and objects from these religions in specific display cases in the Gallery of Religious Life, by including hands-on activity boxes devoted to each of the six major world religions in the Scottish Gallery, and by giving members of these faith groups opportunity to provide testimonials for the gallery displays. The decision to include objects from the six major world religions also influenced the selection of art for the Gallery of Religious Art.

The Scottish Gallery, an exhibition space not discussed specifically in this thesis, explores the development of religion in Scotland. It provides a historic framework to the museum by discussing the evolution of religion from its origins in druidism and paganism and traces the emergence of new religious beliefs in Scottish history. In this vein, the Scottish Gallery demonstrates where each of Glasgow's practiced religious beliefs enter into Scottish history, concluding its examination with the multi-faith character of Glasgow today. This gallery space carefully examines the origins of Catholicism and Protestantism in Scotland, and draws attention to the tension existing between adherents of these two Christian denominations in the display case Catholic versus Protestant.

Methodology

Central to my investigation of St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art is a desire to understand how objects are used to shape meaning, and how meaning is given to objects in various gallery frameworks. These meanings, which are molded by the context of viewing, and are therefore influenced by the methods of display, are used to address larger issues. In my analysis of St Mungo Museum I have chosen to investigate exhibitions and modes of display as a key to an assessment of the museum's mandate. From an examination of display, the narratives woven into the individual galleries become clear, and reveal the course of action taken by the institution to achieve its mandate.

Integral to the arguments made throughout this thesis is a shared understanding of the history of museums. This knowledge legitimizes the logic taken to advance my own argument, grounding my theorizing in a pre-existing

museological framework. Museums in the western world evolved from the sixteenth century cabinets of curiosity, the private collections of avid collectors. Wonder and curiosity of this unknown world was satisfied through the mass collection and display of material culture or natural history in packed cabinets. By seeking to own as many variations or specimens of the collected item, and then displaying them in a cabinet accompanied by text labels listing their name (or genus) and original location, the collector sought understanding.

Museums assumed a public role during the Enlightenment, when the philosophers ascribed to museums the ability to instill reason and rationality in the visitor, arguing that the museum visit leads to gained knowledge, and therefore, the improvement of self.[8] However, turbulent politics in revolutionary France underpinned the Enlightenment-era museum with a political agenda. For example, the Louvre museum, which demonstrates the symbolic power of the museum, was transformed into a receptacle of France's constructed history, a place where the people might witness the strength of their government through the display of amassed objects. As Marie-Claude Chaudonneret states:

> After the collapse of the Empire and the humiliation of defeat, the French needed uniting by being given an identity, by constructing France through inscribing it into time. The need for history thus became a constant preoccupation.[9]

Carol Duncan argues that the Louvre museum carefully organized the state's collected "treasures, trophies, and icons of the past" in a way that highlighted the

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[8] Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 47.
[9] Marie-Claude Chaudonneret, "Historicism and 'Heritage' in the Louvre, 1820-1840: From the Musée Charles X to the Galerie D'Apollon," *Art History* 14, no 4 (December 1991): 488.

glories of the past and linked these triumphs with the current government.[10] The display of objects was deliberate and intended to manipulate the museum visitor's faith in the current government.

Like the philosophers, nineteenth-century social reformers, such as John Ruskin, viewed the museum as a vehicle for social change. These reformers hoped the museum might assist in the raising of moral standards among the working classes. John Ruskin, for example, opened a museum in Sheffield designed specifically for coal miners as a way to educate them about the world. It was hoped that through their exposure to the museum, and therefore new ideas, the working class might be drawn to self-improvement.[11] Although this disciplinary function was a foundational concept of the nineteenth century museum, the museum remained object-focused, using the objects to promote education and using the institution to elevate the object.[12]

The art museum evolved again in the twentieth century because of Modernism. Art objects were displayed principally for their aesthetic qualities. It was thought that through the observation of the art object, the visitor might experience a "spiritual revelation," one similar to the enlightenment reaction the philosophers envisioned.[13] To assist in this ritual end-point, exhibition planners manipulated the space in which the art object was hung by painting the walls white and using minimal text to prevent distraction from the art object. In the twentieth

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[10] Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside public art museums* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 27.
[11] For information on the Museum of St. George visit: www. /www.sheffieldgalleries.org.uk or see the Right Hon. C.F.G. Masterman, *Ruskin the Prophet: And Other Centenary Studies* (London: George Allen Unwin Ltd, 1920), 47-60.
[12] Tony Bennet, 99-100.
[13] Ibid., 16.

century's aesthetic museum the object gained status above the visitor. The museum's focus was not on making displays reflective of audience, but rather, on the importance and value of the objects themselves. The main purpose of museums and not just museums of art but of natural history, ethnology, and anthropology as well, was the preservation, interpretation, and research of objects.[14]

From this evolving museum history comes new ways to understand the contemporary museum. Bruce Ferguson and Mieke Bal examine the role exhibition plays in the advancement of narrative. Bal argues that rhetoric, which is at the core of the institution, needs to be examined. Probing into narrative, or the meaning produced by locating objects in time and space, is one means to understanding the rhetoric of the museum.[15] Bruce Ferguson elucidates this process of understanding narrative. He writes:

> Exhibitions are publicly sanctioned representations of identity, principally, but not exclusively, of the institutions which present them. They are narratives which use art objects as elements in institutionalized stories that are promoted to an audience. Exhibitions act as the visible encounter with a public which receives and acknowledges their import and projected status as important signs of important signs.[16]

Ferguson argues that it is vital to examine not only the exhibition space as a whole, but also the structural components forming the exhibition: its labels, texts, lighting, choice of objects, design, environment, curatorial voice, architecture, videos, brochures, and catalogues. Ferguson suggests that scholars need to consider these

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[14]Kenneth Hudson quoted in Stephen E. Weil, "From Being *about* Something to Being *for* Somebody: The Ongoing Transformation of the American Museum," *Daedalus* (Summer 1999): 230. This trend reflects the methodology used with cabinets of curiosity, which were also object-directed.

[15] Mieke Bal, "The Discourse of the Museum," *Thinking About Exhibitions*, Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson, and Sandy Nairne, eds (London: Routledge, 1996), 205-208.

[16] Bruce W. Ferguson, "Exhibition Rhetorics: material speech and utter sense," *Thinking About Exhibitions*, Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson, and Sandy Nairne, eds (London: Routledge, 1996), 175.

components when analyzing museum exhibitions as they serve as voice to the exhibition, revealing the hidden politics of the display. Ferguson's method of analysis frames my own investigation of St Mungo Museum's galleries, where I scrutinize the exhibition's components in an effort to understand the meaning that is emphasized through the display, and therefore the narrative that advances the institutional mandate.

Two main narratives are explored in this thesis. In the Gallery of Religious Art, objects from differing religious traditions, celebrated for both their religious and aesthetic value, are exhibited alongside one another in an attempt to make visible the shared desire found among religious groups to produce art in response to faith. In this case, art is physical expression of faith practice. The second narrative is woven into the Gallery of Religious Life and shows how people of faith share common ritual practices. Objects are used, in conjunction with interviews and photographs, to link ritual practice to the everyday lives of people. These two narratives work in tandem to help achieve the mandate of the museum.

Also informing this analytical approach is the work by Victoria Newhouse. In her book *Art and the Power of Placement* Newhouse has examined how the changing meaning of objects is linked with the work's location within the museum, looking both at how display influences the visitor's understanding of objects, and how contextualizing these objects within museums also manipulates meaning.[17] In her second chapter "Art or Archaeology: How Display Defines the Object," Newhouse uses a traveling exhibition *Egyptian Art in the Age of Pyramids* to discover how the

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[17] Victoria Newhouse, *Art and the Power of Placement*, (New York: The Monacelli Press, Inc., 2000).

context of display influences the visitor's understanding of the Egyptian material. She writes: "in each of these three venues [the Grand Palais in Paris, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto], different presentation of approximately the same objects defined the objects as either art or archeological finds."[18] Presentation ranged from displaying objects in dimly lit spaces, strewn on thin layers of sand, and crowded together, evoking a sense of archeology, to a more formal, sparse exhibition of works, accrediting these works as art. My work moves beyond the focus of Newhouse's analysis, as institutional context, along with display, influences my critique of the exhibition space. Although Newhouse carefully examines the display of these objects to argue how these works are shown as either aesthetic or archeological, she fails to reflect upon the institutional contexts of these three exhibition venues. The specific nature of the Met as a museum of art influences the choice curators made in displaying these Egyptian treasures as art; furthermore, the lack of institutional context of the Grand Palais in Paris, which serves as an exhibition hall, freed curators to play with the archeological nature of the display. In my thesis I examine how the context of religion affects the reading of objects in the Gallery of Religious Life and the Gallery of Religious Art.

Another theme explored in this thesis is the shifting meanings or significances of objects as they move from sacred to secular. Informing this analysis are Ronald Grimes and Ivan Gaskell who both address this issue by questioning the existence of sacred meaning in museum spaces. Grimes examines this issue by looking at the use of sacred objects as commodity in his essay "Sacred Objects in Museum Spaces."

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[18] Ibid., 109.

This insightful essay elucidates the problematics of displaying sacred objects, observing the commodification of these items by museums. He suggests, "the difficulty arises from fundamental differences between the values and perceptions of Western viewers and those of the traditions and cultures out of which many displayed objects come."[19] Grimes furthers his argument by investigating the way that the art object changes its meaning as it moves to different locations because of the object's commodity factor. He concludes that sacred objects should not be considered as things, but more like people, as many sacred objects are considered to be living by their creating cultures.

Ivan Gaskell's essay "Sacred to Profane and Back Again," explores the changing meaning of the art object.[20] Gaskell's essay addresses the complexities associated with objects created for a religious function and then moved to the 'secular' museum space. He questions whether displaying these objects in the museum environment suppresses their sacred nature. He backs his argument by examining three case studies: a Tibetan altar, an Orthodox Icon, and ceremonial dance regalia. Gaskell's discussion of the Tibetan altar parallels actions taken by the Hindu community at St Mungo Museum.

Chapter Analysis:

Chapter 1 is an investigation into the multiple meanings given religious objects in the Gallery of Religious Art. I argue that while western viewers are

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[19] Ronal Grimes, "Sacred Objects in Museum Spaces," *Studies in Religion* 21, no. 4 (1992): 420.
[20] Ivan Gaskell, "Sacred to Profane and Back Again," *Art and its Publics: Museum Studies at the Millennium*, Andrew McClellan, ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2003) 149-164.

accustomed to seeing historical Christian artworks exhibited as art, they are unaccustomed to the pairing of Christian artworks with those produced by other religious groups. This grouping of objects is deliberate in the Gallery of Religious Art and advances the narrative of the gallery by drawing visitors' attention to the diversity of objects created in response to religious belief. I contend that this narrative is essential to the achievement of the museum's institutional goals. Yet, while there is a strong focus upon viewing similarities between these objects, there is a visible tension between the sacred and secular nature of individual religious works. An exploration of these differing meanings is a focus of this chapter.

Chapter 2 examines the juxtaposed display of the Gallery of Religious Life to the Gallery of Religious Art to determine how these two galleries contribute to the museum's rhetoric. I argue that through the use of ritual objects, curators speak to the impact of religion on a daily basis. Through objects, testimonials, and photographs, visitors are shown that people of faith all use ritual to make sense of life.

Finally, chapter three explores the meaning community participation plays into visitors' understanding of the religious objects. In the museum, communities are both the communicated and the communicators; the museum focuses specifically upon Glasgow's religious communities through texts, photographs, and interviews, but it has allowed its communities their own chance to speak by providing believers the opportunity to participate in the planning of exhibitions, and by offering testimonials and statements of belief. This last chapter explores the way community is integrated into the museum as a means to advance the mandate of the museum.

All three chapters work in tandem to illustrate how the meanings given objects through choices in display reinforce the museum's rhetoric. In the museum's first gallery, the Gallery of Religious Art, objects are carefully arranged to emphasize their aesthetic values. In the Gallery of Religious Life, the texts, photographs, and testimonials contextualize the objects to suggest ritual meaning. Finally, through an analysis of the direct participation of religious believers in the museum, primarily in the Scottish Gallery, the Gallery of Religious Life, the temporary exhibition space and public programming, I underline the shared desire of religious groups and the museum to work towards mutual understanding and respect.

Introduction Figure List

Figure 1
Model for the proposed Glasgow Cathedral Visitor Centre, now found on the 4th Level of St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art

Figure 2
Zen Garden with Glasgow Cathedral in Background
Created by Yasuataro Tanaka, spring 1993

Figure 3
Necropolis, View from the 3rd Floor of St Mungo Museum

Figure 4
North Façade of St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art

All photographs were taken at St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art by the author, May 2005

Chapter 1: Sacred or Secular?

The Multiple Meanings Attributed to Religious Objects in the Gallery of Religious Art

When western viewers enter an art museum, they expect to see art from Christendom exhibited in a way that emphasizes their aesthetic qualities. Unfamiliar to western viewers are religious objects from non-Christian cultures presented as art and displayed alongside religious artworks representative of most religions. In many museums, the inclusion of these religious objects is used to demonstrate cultural advancement, showing how western culture has evolved from, or surpassed other cultures, or these works are presented in ethnographic terms. At St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art, religious objects representing religious movements from around the globe are exhibited collectively and displayed as works of art in the Gallery of Religious Art. Through display, religious artworks are exhibited to enhance visitors' reading of these works as art to reinforce the collective practice of faith believers of producing art in response to their faith. As the text panel reads:

> Many religions use works of art to communicate their meaning. These often appear beautiful and profound, even to a non believer. Several works of art from different religions have been brought together here to give visitors an insight into the faiths of different people.[21]

The Gallery of Religious Art is the first gallery space encountered by visitors. Bright and airy, with high ceilings, this room showcases religious objects from Glasgow Museums' collection that are considered excellent examples of artistic expression in the service of faith. In this chapter, I explore how this first gallery is central to the

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[21] The introductory text panel in the Gallery of Religious Art, St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art, as it was printed in May 2005.

museum's overarching goal of exploring the material culture associated with the world's major religions, by investigating the meanings emerging from the gallery's display. This gallery brings together objects from various aboriginal faiths, from Eastern and Western faiths, and from modern and ancient religions to emphasize, through display, their aesthetic, rather than ritual character. As I will argue, however, the emphasis on the aesthetic suggested by the display is often countered by the labels and other textual information which emphasizes objects' religious function. This seems to be particularly the case in non-western works. An exploration of the tension between the aesthetic and the functional nature of these religious objects in the Gallery of Religious Art is therefore the central focus of this chapter.

Emphasizing the Aesthetic in the Gallery of Religious Art:

The introductory text panel frames a visit to the Gallery of Religious Art. It is a convention used by the curatorial team to brief visitors, and to reveal to them the museum's vision for this gallery space. The text panel describes the mutual practice of religious groups to produce beautiful religious objects—thereby alerting visitors to the all-encompassing narrative of the gallery. Like the title of the gallery itself—the Gallery of Religious Art—the text panel stresses the dual emphasis placed upon the religious and aesthetic value of the objects in this gallery space. This label signals to visitors the context needed to view the Gallery of Religious Art's objects, by providing them with a framework to locate the objects' implied meanings.

When visitors finish reading the panel and step into the main exhibition hall, a large open room engulfs them (figure 8). The ceilings are high, further emphasized

by the enormous stained glass windows that are embedded into the gallery walls, causing coloured light to filter into the room. These windows add an intriguing luminosity to the otherwise white space. Although the gallery was created from the skeleton of a pre-existing project, the height of the ceilings and the brightness of the room contribute to the resemblance of this space to an art museum. This is further reinforced by the curatorial team's deliberate choice to space between objects, a modernist display technique used to focus visitors' attention on the aesthetic qualities of artworks.[22] Yet, the large stained glass windows, which add light to the gallery space, also reference Christian churches. Despite the display techniques used to emphasize the aesthetic reading of these objects, the allusion to a church evoked by the windows grounds the Gallery of Religious Art within a religious context.

When visitors first enter the Gallery of Religious Art, they are presented with a montage of objects representative of indigenous cultures. These include a late nineteenth-century Chilkat Blanket from the Canadian West Coast (figure 9), a Nigerian Ancestral Screen dating between the seventeenth and the nineteenth century (figure 10), and a twentieth-century Australian Aboriginal work entitled *Kangaroo Wild Cabbage, Ceremonial Spear, Possum and Brush Carrot Dreaming* (figure 11).

The layout of the gallery encourages visitors to create parallels between faiths. By exhibiting indigenous works together, for example, visitors are able to see how spirituality is a common theme found in tribal art. Difference is also made visible. By carefully selecting works that greatly differ from one another in terms of medium,

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[22] Brian O'Doherty's discussion of the Museum of Modern Art in the 1930s in *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (Santa Monica and San Francisco: The Lapis Press, 1976).

artistic intention, and age, the curatorial team further elevated the aesthetic merits of each object, giving artistic status to the tribal groups producing these objects.

In the same area of the gallery, visitors also encounter a glass case with objects from ancient Japan, China, and Greece. These works include a Qing Dynasty (c. 1662-1722) porcelain bowl decorated with Taoist immortals, a *bi* disc dating around 2000 BCE, a Greek vase depicting *Theseus and the Minotaur*, and a first-century CE statue of *Hermes* (figure 12). By depicting these cultures together in this case, the curatorial narrative expands beyond the current day to include the examination of religious objects produced by people spanning all periods of time.

A selection of Buddhist statuary is found perpendicular to the Asian works. Placed in a row, visitors are shown two examples of Buddha Shakyamani dating from the late eighteenth to the nineteenth century, and a Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara figure from the eighteenth century (figure 13). On the opposite side of the gallery, curatorial staff have placed works representative of the Middle East. Examples include an Egyptian mummy mask from circa 500 BCE enclosed tomb-like in a glass display case, a seventeenth-century Turkish Prayer Rug, displayed parallel to the ground facing Mecca, and *The Attributes of Divine Perfection*, a modern piece of calligraphy created by Ahmed Moustafa in 1987, which is shown at the head of the rug (figure 14).

Objects from Christendom constitute the last grouping in the main gallery space, including the stained glass windows which once decorated Christian churches in Glasgow (figure 15), a circa 1480 walnut wood pietà figurine from Belgium, *The Virgin Mary Holding the Infant Jesus*, hangs against the back wall of the gallery, and

looming high above the visitor is the gallery's prized piece, Salvador Dali's 1951 oil on canvas *Christ of St John of the Cross* (figures 16 and 17). The placement of the Dali painting is deliberate: the height chosen to hang the work reinforces the sensation of Christ looking down upon the visitor, elevating its religious association, while also emphasizing the aesthetic qualities of the artwork. The unusual view of Christ creates an eerie and uncomfortable quality to the work, a unique and profound characteristic underscoring Dali's claim to genius. Furthermore, this painting is visible at eye-level from the balcony, and is instantly sighted when entering the gallery because of its placement along the back wall of the gallery.

There is visual simplicity to the display of objects in the main section of the Gallery of Religious Art. The openness of the gallery's floor plan and the sparseness of objects focus visitors' attention on the objects' aesthetic qualities. For example, paintings such as *Christ of St John of the Cross* and *Kangaroo Wild Cabbage, Ceremonial Spear, Possum and Brush Carrot Dreaming* are hung on gallery walls, emphasizing their formal qualities. Small statuary are exhibited like *objects d'art*, protected in glass cases. The vitrine does not hinder the visitor's study of the aesthetic qualities of these objects; rather, the case draws attention to these works and allows a critical distance to view the objects. Furthermore, the individual significance of these objects is reinforced by exhibiting the Buddhist statuary, the Pietà, the Nigerian Ancestral Screen, and the Egyptian mummy mask as single objects in vitrines. Non-western artworks, such as the Chilkat Blanket, which is usually viewed in ethnographic terms, is given aesthetic importance through its display—stretched open and pinned up like a wall-hanging in a glass case,

emphasizing the visual components of the blanket. Each work is individually lit, further stressing the importance of the objects.

A secondary exhibition space—or antechamber—connects to the main gallery space through a small doorway and completes the Gallery of Religious Art. While objects are divided into religious type in the main gallery, religious works are intermingled in the antechamber. The visitor first sees tiny late fifteenth to early sixteenth-century plaquette engravings depicting the crucifixion, entombment, and resurrection of Christ by Galeazzo Mondella and a fifteenth-century German stained glass window, *The Coronation of the Virgin*. Next to these Christian windows and engravings is an oil on canvas painting by Jewish artist Dora Holzhandler (born 1928) called *Sabbath Candles* (figure 18). This warm image depicts the artist's memories of her family participating in the Sabbath meal. To the right of Holzhandler's piece is another stained glass window of a Christian saint, which shines above the late eighteenth century Hindu statue of Shiva As Nataraja. Unlike other objects in the Gallery of Religious Art, this large statue stands erect upon an altar-like pedestal. This shrine is consecrated, strewn with rice, and is accompanied by Hindi music and low colourful lighting.[23] The final piece in the antechamber is a small German alabaster pietà sculpture dating circa 1440 (figure 19).

In religious terms, the intermingling of objects in the antechamber reinforces the universal desire of people of faith to produce art in response to their beliefs. Yet,

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[23] The Shiva As Nataraja is the only piece in the Gallery of Religious Art that is displayed with soft lighting and music. It, too, is the only work presented as a shrine. The work is now screened off by glass to protect it from visitors. In 1993 a visitor pushed the shrine over "in the name of Christ," and the work now suffers from hairline fractures. The glass will remain until the museum has the opportunity to fix the Shiva. From an interview with Curator of World Religions, Alison Kelly, the 22 May 2005 at St Mungo Museum. See also Mark O'Neill, "Serious Earth," *Museum Journal* (February 1994): 28-30.

in aesthetic terms, this side-gallery makes visible the distinct aesthetic styles used by religious groups to produce their spiritual objects. Contrasting Dora Holzhandler's *Sabbath Candles* with the Shiva As Nataraja draws attention to the differing aesthetic philosophies of Hindu and Jewish art. The Shiva As Nataraja celebrates the awesomeness of the Hindu deity, while Holzhandler's work fits within the tradition of Jewish belief that discourages visual depictions of God. Instead, Holzhandler's work focuses upon the celebration of religious life, portraying a Jewish family celebrating the Sabbath meal.

The immediate tactic used in the Gallery of Religious Art is to present religious objects as art by emphasizing the objects' formal qualities through strategies of display. This is achieved by modeling display techniques after conventional modes of exhibiting art.[24] By making the form of display recognizable to visitors, the curatorial team took the critical step needed to convince visitors of the aesthetic nature of the objects. The quietness of the gallery, the high white walls, the spotlighting, the space between objects, the vitrines, and the methods of hanging and exhibiting the objects are methods of display associated with art galleries or museums. These display strategies work together to draw attention to the aesthetic nature of objects in the Gallery of Religious Art.

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[24] Common practices of displaying art are explained in Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach's work "The Universal Survey Museum," *Art History* 3, no 4 (December 1980): 448-469, and Duncan's own book *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (London: Routledge, 1995). These two sources examine Universal Survey Museums, large museums that house national collections and promote the ideals of the state. For a description of the art gallery's evolution under the influence of modernism, see Brian O'Doherty's discussion of the Museum of Modern Art in the 1930s in *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (Santa Monica and San Francisco: The Lapis Press, 1976).

Emphasizing the Religious in the Gallery of Religious Art:

In most art galleries, art historical convention dictates that the religious nature of the artworks is ignored in favour of aesthetic qualities. For example, a Renaissance Virgin and Child painting, on display in an art museum, will be revered for its composition and use of colour rather than for its devotional qualities. Because St Mungo Museum is a museum of "religious art and life," the religious nature of the objects on display is not ignored. Again, it is the introductory panel that provides visitors with a framework to explore this religious significance by clearly stating "many religions use works of art to communicate their meaning." This sentence demonstrates the strong link between religion and art. Many of the objects displayed in the Gallery of Religious Art have been previously limited to an aesthetic or an anthropological meaning based upon where they had been exhibited prior to their placement in St Mungo Museum. Yet, the Gallery of Religious Art intends to reinforce both aesthetic and religious meaning. Former Senior Curator of History for Glasgow Museums, Mark O'Neill, describes the objective for the Gallery of Religious Art:

> Our aim was to give objects a meaning which they had lost by becoming part of our collections. The power of religion to move and motivate people means that this is more than an attempt to create an interesting exhibition. It is an intervention in society, a contribution towards creating greater tolerance and mutual respect among those of different faiths and those with none.[25]

Many of the treasures housed in the Gallery of Religious Art have distinct religious meaning for the producing faith groups. For many, the religious function determined the aesthetic nature of the object, and holds greater importance to the believer. While

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[25] Mark O'Neill, "Serious Earth," *Museum Journal* (February 1994): 22. O'Neill is currently the Director of Glasgow Museums.

the aesthetic meaning of the work dominates in the Gallery of Religious Art, there are instances where the religious meaning supersedes the aesthetic meaning determined by its display. In these cases religious meaning reminds visitors that these objects are prized for both their aesthetic and religious qualities. As this gallery intends to demonstrate to visitors that religious art is shared and valued by people of many faiths, it is important that these objects are examined for both of these meanings. This is sometimes achieved by placing the object in an environment reminiscent of its religious environment, but most often, reference to religious use appears strongly in the text panels accompanying the object. It is interesting, however, that the clearest examples of curators highlighting the object's religious function occur with objects of Eastern faiths, as evidenced by the Turkish Prayer Rug and the Shiva as Nataraja.

The Turkish Prayer Rug came to St Mungo Museum from the Burrell Collection, one of Glasgow's thirteen civic museums.[26] Prayer rugs and other textiles are hung like paintings at the Burrell Collection, linking the rug with art, and reflecting interest in textiles as art pieces. The text panels at the Burrell Collection listed the item's name (this is a prayer rug) and connected it to the Islamic Collection. When the rug was exhibited as part of the Burrell Collection, its aesthetic value was emphasized by using the rug as representative of artistic style rather than discussing its religious function. With its transfer to the Gallery of Religious Art at St Mungo Museum, the Turkish Prayer Rug is no longer displayed as a wall hanging, but rather

[26] The Burrell Collection is the collection of the late Sir William Burrell who donated his collection to Glasgow Museums in 1944. The Burrell Collection is one of 13 museums operated by Glasgow Museums. See www.glasgowmuseums.com for more information on this collection.

is displayed in a position that mimics its religious purpose: it is placed parallel to the ground and is set upon a small mount facing East.

Text paneling is used to further clarify the Turkish Prayer Rug's religious value. The text panel begins with the work's name: Turkish Prayer Rug. From this title, the curators describe the object: "Namazlyk—an Islamic prayer rug which incorporates within its design a depiction of an architectural mosque facing Mecca." This text connects the religious object with its believers. From this description, curatorial staff explore the use of prayer rugs, outlining the faith ritual associated with the act of prayer:

> One of the five duties of Islam is to pray five times a day. Prayer is performed in a clean place after a ritual washing, facing Mecca, birthplace of the prophet Muhammad. In poor areas, mats made of rushes may be used to protect those praying from the dirty ground. Fine quality rugs such as this one were, and are, used by those able to afford them. The Mihrab (niche) serves to orientate the rug for prayer, and is placed towards Mecca. The person praying prostrates himself, kneeling and touching his forehead to the motif in the Mihrab.[27]

The function of the prayer rug is central to this descriptive text. The curatorial team provides a detailed account of how the rug is used daily by Muslims as they pray, and by explaining the principles basic to prayer rugs, they have ensured that visitors leave the gallery space knowing what a prayer rug is.

Following the paragraph on its use, the curatorial team then provides the viewer with information describing the materials and construction of this object:

> This wool and cotton rug was made in the 17th century, in Anatolia, Turkey. Traditionally, Islam has discouraged the use of images of living creatures, and on this rug the decoration consists mainly of stylized floral motifs in rich colours. Prayer rugs, because of their holy function are worthy of the finest craftsmanship. Each knot is tied for the glory of Allah and every rug contains

[27] From the Turkish Prayer Rug text panel label as it read May 2005.

> at least one deliberate mistake, as only Allah (God) is capable of producing perfect works. Mortals must not presume to rival this power, for fear of retribution in this world or the next.[28]

This final section of the text panel for the Turkish Prayer Rug explains the intricacies involved in creating a prayer rug. The panel describes the religious philosophies that dictate the appearance of the rug, such as lack of representation of living creatures, and the spiritual devotion involved in creating a rug. This last paragraph of the text panel is important to the over-arching narrative of the Gallery of Religious Art, uniting religious practice with artistic merit.

The curatorial decision to display Ahmed Moustafa's calligraphy piece *The Attributes of Divine Perfection* at the head of the prayer rug reinforces the tension at play between the religious and aesthetic meanings given the rug in the Gallery of Religious Art. Moustafa's work is exemplary of Islamic calligraphy, an art form that is sacred to Muslims as it reflects the language spoken by Allah to the Prophet.[29] Moustafa's adherence to this religious practice gives his work a strong identity as an Islamic devotional artwork. Yet, Moustafa is also an active artist who chooses to make religion part of his artistic practice. Moustafa draws upon this visual form "in his search to offer a glimpse, in artistic form, of the indescribably and inexpressibly sacred."[30] Moustafa's artwork, therefore, integrates artistic and religious meaning. Moustafa's piece was created to be art but uses religion as its subject, while the rug is created to be a functional ritual object made with great craftsmanship. The

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[28] Ibid.
[29] Claire Cranston, "Mapping the Unseen at St Mungo Museum of Religious Life & Art." <www.24hourmuseum.org.uk.> (14 March 2006).
[30] Ibid.

juxtaposition of these religious works highlights the individual tension at play between religious and aesthetic value in the Gallery of Religious Art.

This conflict between aesthetic value and religious use is also evident in the display of the Shiva As Nataraja, which is housed in the antechamber of the gallery. The antechamber was constructed to create an altar-like setting for the Shiva. By creating a smaller space, curators were able to bathe the statue in coloured light and accompany the work with soft music. This artwork is raised on a plinth, and rice is strewn at the base of the statue in an effort to signify an altarpiece. The curatorial team lavished the Shiva with these effects in response to feedback received by the Hindu community which argued that the Shiva, as a visual image of god, needed to be looked up to.[31] Therefore, the Shiva stands before the visitors in the power and majesty of a religious statue. Its religious function is highlighted through its means of display. A Christian fundamentalist attacked the Shiva statue by pushing it to the ground thereby damaging its foundation, and thus confirmed the religious power conveyed by the display of the Shiva: when asked why he responded in this way, he "said he did it for Christ."[32] Yet, although the plinth is suggestive of an altarpiece, heightening the Shiva's link to religion, plinths are also commonly used supports in museum display. This plinth speaks to both the Shiva's religious and aesthetic associations.

Antonia Lovelace, curator of anthropology during St Mungo's formative years, describes the Shiva's value in aesthetic, religious, and monetary and promotional terms. She states:

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[31] From my interview with Alison Kelly and Harry Dunlop, 23 May, 2005.
[32] Mark O'Neill, "Serious Earth," 31.

> . . . and a large bronze Siva Nataraja from India was purchased from a collector in the Netherlands and probably dates from the end of the eighteenth century; it cost around £80, 000 and has proved its value in the acclaim it has received from the local Hindu community and many other visitors, as well as its success as a poster image.[33]

Altering how the Shiva is displayed implies that the object's religious meaning supersedes its aesthetic value; however, Lovelace's quote suggests that the curatorial team prized the Shiva for its aesthetic merit. To use the Shiva as a visual image of the gallery suggests that the Shiva assists strongly in the narrative of the gallery. This narrative speaks to the common occurrence of religious art, showing how many religions produce art in response to faith. This gallery uses religious objects, and through their display, emphasizes the aesthetic meaning of the objects to demonstrate the value of these works as pieces of art. In this effort, curators hope to challenge western viewers to look beyond objects of Christendom as reflecting aesthetic value, to see religious works from many different faiths as representative of artistic quality. Yet, the narrative of the gallery does not limit visitors' reading of objects simply to an aesthetic one—the religious meaning is also made visible through display, as seen in the case of the Shiva. It speaks to religious function through its display and its accompanying text label, yet the artistic integrity of the piece itself demands that the aesthetic value not be ignored.

The design team for the Gallery of Religious Art introduced one unusual display convention into the space. Two narrow windows are built into the dividing wall between the main gallery space and the antechamber. These windows offer a surprising view of the side of the Shiva and the back of the pietà statues. Although

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[33] Antonia Lovelace, "St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art—A New Development in Glasgow," *Journal of Museum Ethnography* no. 7 (1995): 64.

these windows offer alternative perspectives of the statues found in the gallery, they also complicate the thematic display of Christianity that is organized along the gallery's north end (figure 17). The tiny window revealing the Shiva statue is found on the same wall where Christian art is explored. Why have curators interrupted the thematic display of Christian art to include a glimpse of Hindu art? Perhaps the curatorial team intend for this display tactic to remind viewers that while Christianity boasts visually stunning works such as *Christ of St John of the Cross*, other religions, too, have artistic masterpieces.

More tangibly, however, the windows act as signposts to the antechamber. While visiting the Gallery of Religious Art, it is easy to overlook the antechamber. The display of objects within the gallery entices visitors to move around the wall spaces, and their eyes are drawn not to the door of the antechamber that blends into the architectural structure of the room, but rather to the Gallery of Religious Life, which grabs visitors' attention due to the blackness of the entryway. Using windows, visitors are made aware of objects on the other side of the wall.[34]

The vast assortment of religious objects coupled with their display demonstrates the common production of religious artworks among people of faith. These works are shown both as aesthetic and religious treasures, through text paneling, lighting, thematic organization and through the context of the Gallery of Religious Art itself. Yet, although these works are esteemed for their religious value in this gallery, is their sacred value also evident in a museum focused on religion?

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[34] This glimpse of art objects in the antechamber is what drew my attention to this side gallery. Without these visual cues, I would have proceeded to the Gallery of Religious Life.

Sacred or Secular?

Scholars argue that the spiritual nature of religious art is removed from the work when displayed in a museum or an art gallery. Ronald Grimes, for example, asserts:

> Sacred objects in synagogues, temples and churches are one thing; in museums or art galleries they are another. Even if their 'exegetical' meaning (that is what people say about them) were to remain the same, their 'positional' meaning (that is, their spatial and/or conceptual relationship with other symbols) is necessarily different.[35]

Grimes argues that it is impossible to see religious art holding the same sacred meaning when moved from its religious environment to a museum. This argument holds true for Grimes because of the museum's historical position as being a secular environment. During the eighteenth century, Enlightenment thinkers called for the separation of church and state as a means to ground politics in reason, thereby abolishing the absolute rule of monarchs. As S.J. Barnett writes:

> By eliminating superstition and clerical influence, which they understood as a key barrier to human progress, the philosophes hoped to renew society. They wished to bring about a new rational, humane and progressive social order, in which the faculty of reason would be free to work for the benefit of all humanity.[36]

The rearrangement of the Louvre museum during the French Revolution was a symbolic gesture of this new philosophy. In November 1789, the French State appropriated Church property. To demonstrate the accessibility of the State's treasures to the public, art was removed from churches and monasteries and taken to the Louvre and newly established provincial museums. As Andrew McClellan has

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[35] Ronald L. Grimes, "Sacred objects in museum spaces," *Studies in Religion* 21, no 4 (1992): 419-420.
[36] S. J. Barnett, *The Enlightenment and Religion: The Myths of Modernity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 17.

noted, it seemed that "overnight an immense artistic and historic heritage ceased to function meaningfully in a religious context and entered the public domain as *biens nationaux*, 'at the disposition of the Nation.'"[37]

With the Nation's art treasures now housed in the museum, the State used these treasures to narrate its new history. Works of art hung in this fashion were stripped of their religious purposes and infused with a history of artistic genius. They became the voice of a triumphant nation state, speaking of talent and victory rather than religious function. Art became the visible symbol of rational thought. As other nations modeled their museums after the Louvre, the secular nature of the art museum became understood as universal.[38]

Despite the emphasis placed upon the secular environment of the museum, the language used to describe the Enlightenment museum is infused with words that connote the sacred. The museum was not a sacred space that propagated religious experience, but rather, it became a temple for the ideologies of reason. For example, Duncan Cameron refers to the museum as a temple, while Donald Horne parallels museum visits to pilgrimages.[39] Furthermore, Carol Duncan links the museum visit to ritual, suggesting that the direction visitors move through the gallery space, the way visitors pause and reflect before certain artworks, or the quietness of the galleries is similar to the rituals undertaken by believers in a church. The highly ritual nature of the museum visit results in visitors experiencing liminality, a transformative ritual

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[37] Andrew McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre: Art, Politics, and the Origins of the Modern Museum in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 92.
[38] Carol Duncan, 27.
[39] See Duncan F. Cameron, "The Museum, a Temple or the Forum," *Journal of World History* 14, no. 1 (1972): 191-202 and Donald Horne, *The Great Museum: the Re-Presentation of History* (London and Sydney: Pluto Press, 1984).

end-point. In the secular museum, this ritual end-point is linked to gained understanding of reason and rationality—resulting in the affirmation of society's faith in modernity.

The projection of sacred values on the museum fits within the definition of the sacred provided by Veikko Anttonen's *cognitive and cultural model*: "[a] relational category of thought and action, which becomes actualized in specific value-loaded situations when a change in the contextually interpreted boundaries of temporal, territorial or corporeal categories takes place."[40] Anttonen's model suggests that the parameters surrounding the sacred are subject to change, based upon the boundaries set by society. During the Enlightenment these boundaries changed and moved away from the confines of the church. The philosophers heralded reason and rationality as a new type of sacred truth, thus setting the boundaries of the sacred as encompassed in Enlightenment thought. With these values institutionalized in the museum, the museum itself became the tangible venue of sacred Enlightenment thought.

How then do sacred works operate in a secular environment? Anttonen suggests that these works stand as symbols for reason and sacred truth. This concept spurs Ena Giurescu Heller to ask:

> Do museums, then, purposefully take the religious out of art, in order to make the art more accessible, less problematic, and more appealing? The answer to this question depends on the specifics of museums, and on factors such as the type of museum, its mission, as well as particulars of the collection, and sources of funding. . . . Generally speaking, we need to be mindful of the fact that works of art in our museums no longer fulfill their religious function: they are there not to glorify God, but rather to illustrate the narrative of human artistic achievement. Museums display these works as cultural artifacts rather

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[40] Veikko Anttonen. "Sacred," *The Guide to the Study of Religion*, Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon, eds. (London and New York: Cassel, 2000), 278.

> than religious art, and install them according to the chronology of styles and cultural geography.[41]

Giurescu Heller's argument that sacred art objects are stripped of their religious function when placed in the museum environment is compelling, yet it does not necessarily apply to the specific case of St Mungo Museum. When Anttonen and Duncan speak of the transformation of the art object, they discuss the artwork in the context of the universal survey museum. Indeed, these museums use art objects to transmit cultural knowledge of national achievement and artistic merit. Does this argument hold true in a museum of religion? The institutional nature of St Mungo Museum, with its curatorial focus on the material culture of religion, contextualizes objects as religious. The space, however, is not a religious space, but rather a museum. Visitors' experiences of the 'sacred' in the Gallery of Religious Art is not an intentional end-point of the museum visit, but rather is consequential to visitors' own perceptions of and reactions to objects.

Despite the narrative created in the Enlightenment museum, one that presupposes the religious neutrality of the art object, the museum is not free of the biases that museum visitors bring to their experiences nor is it free of the meanings that the represented cultures link with its sacred objects. Ronald Grimes suggests that "the difficulty arises from fundamental differences between the values and perceptions of Western Viewers and those of the traditions and cultures out of which many displayed objects come."[42] The religious theme of St Mungo Museum complicates visitors' understandings of the art object. When thinking of religion,

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[41] Ena Giurescu Heller, "Religion on a Pedestal: Exhibiting Sacred Art," *Reluctant Partners: Art and Religion in Dialogue*, Ena Giurescu Heller, ed. (New York: The American Bible Society, 2004). 124.
[42] Ronald Grimes, 420.

visitors brings with them their own beliefs and cultural knowledge of faith as well as their own understanding of art. These act as screens, preventing the visitor from looking at the artworks in completely neutral terms. Alison Kelly, acting Curator of Religion for Glasgow Museums, notes:

> Objects are never purely 'objectified.' Sacred objects, indeed all objects, in museums are given meaning on many different yet related levels; by the individual who owned the object, by the community from which he or she was a part, by the curator of the displays and by the visitor to the museum.[43]

Kelly's observance is readily evident in visitors' mixed response to the gallery's famous work *Christ of St John of the Cross*. Visitors offer a range of reactions to this work: some find this work sacred in a religious sense; others believe that this work is sacred as a masterwork.

Christ of St John of the Cross:

Salvador Dali's painting *Christ of St John of the Cross* was St Mungo Museum's most famous work, and came to St Mungo Museum from Glasgow's universal survey museum, the Kelvingrove Museum.[44] Then Director of Glasgow Museums, Dr. Tom Honeyman, purchased the work directly from the artist's studio in 1952, one year after the painting's completion. This work, now worth tens of millions, has "been repaid with several thousand per cent interest, not only in the postcards and reproductions which hang on countless walls, but also in the tourists

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[43] Alison Kelly, "St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art, Glasgow," *Material Religion* 1 no. 3 (November 2005): 435.

[44] As of 11 July 2006, Dali's painting *Christ of St John of the Cross* no longer hangs in St Mungo Museum. Instead, it has been returned to the Kelvingrove Museum. Because this change took place after my research for this project was complete, I have chosen to discuss the gallery as I experienced it.

who come from all over the world to view the painting."[45] In its home at the Kelvingrove Museum, Honeyman's display of *Christ of St John of the Cross* emphasized the ideology that Roger Kimball describes in his essay "The Museum as Fun House." He charges the art museum with a twofold curatorial purpose: "…[to] exhibit objects of historical interest and commanding aesthetic achievement, and to nurture the public's direct experience of those objects."[46] The Kelvingrove's display of *Christ of St John of the Cross* met these two objectives. The work is often termed "Glasgow's most famous art treasure" or "one of the most famous pictures in the world and one of the great paintings of the twentieth century."[47] These designations suggest that the Kelvingrove met the first objective by exhibiting and cherishing this piece. It met the second criterion by directing the viewer, through its display in a universal survey museum, to read the work for its aesthetic properties.[48]

At the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, the aesthetic qualities of *Christ of St John of the Cross* were emphasized through its display. Honeyman's interest in purchasing the work for display at the Kelvingrove museum was based upon the way it moved him when he saw the work in a London storefront. Honeyman justified spending the remainder of the fund created by the profits from the Kelvingrove International Exhibition of 1901 based upon the reaction of the crowd that gathered around the painting in the London gallery. Honeyman convinced City Council that this painting would attract a constant audience to the Kelvingrove Museum. When

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[45] "Record View—Missing the big picture," *Scottish Daily Record*, 31 March 2001, 8. Also see "Dali Returns to Kelvingrove" *BBC News Online*, 2 June 2006.
[46] Roger Kimball, "The Museum as fun house," *New Criterion* 19, issue 6 (Feb 2001): 5.
[47] Graeme Murray, "Ex-museums chief says he regrets moving city's top art treasure from Kelvingrove," *Evening Times*, 20 August, 2002, 13.
[48] Duncan F. Cameron, "The Museum, a Temple or the Forum," *Journal of World History* 14, no 1 (1972): 195.

the painting first arrived there, it was displayed in a corner room—alongside other religious works, and visitors were asked to pay a small admission fee. It was later placed in a curtained section of the balcony, then it was given an altar-like setting when it was moved to the end of a vaulted colonnade of one of the upstairs corridors, ascribing it a sense of importance as visitors were confronted by it once they moved down the long hall. Finally, it was used as the centerpiece for the 'Art and the Church' gallery in 1990 before it was moved to St Mungo Museum in 1993.[49]

Dali's genius as an artist was an important theme in the discourse around the painting while it hung in the Kelvingrove Museum. The fame of the artist, and the international prestige of the work itself, drew visitors to the Kelvingrove Museum. It is "the striking angle of the crucified Christ on the Cross, the eerie contrast of light and dark, and the magical and effortless surface effects all make an unforgettable impression on the viewer."[50] The Kelvingrove Museum operated as a venue where genius, both ascribed to the artist and the image of genius created by the artist, was welcomed as a point of entry used to analyze the artwork.

Although the Gallery of Religious Art at St Mungo Museum is considered a gallery of art, the meaning that Dali's work has taken on in this new viewing space is different from what this work signified during the 41 years that it was housed at the Kelvingrove Museum, where it was praised for its artistic merits. When placed

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[49] From "Salvador Dali's 'Christ of St John of the Cross' Wins Poll," Tuesday 30 August 2005 on Glasgow Museum's website: <http://www.glasgowmuseums.com/showNews.cfm?venueid=0&itemid=336> (June 2006).

[50] From "Salvador Dali Masterpiece Returns to Kelvingrove," Friday 2 June 2006 on Glasgow Museum's website: <http://www.glasgowmuseums.com/venue/showNews.cfm?venueid=4&itemid=442> (June 2006).

within a museum of religion, Dali's work is used as a symbol of Christianity.[51] Its location among religious works, its labeling, and its grouping with other Christian art objects index this work within the religious realm. In the visitor guidebook, this work represents the notion of 'Christ the Crucified.' Its placement within the gallery is carefully calculated so that the height of the work adds to the visual sense that Christ is looking down at museum visitors. Hanging Dali's painting in this environment helps support the curatorial staff's aim to have visitors look beyond the art historical reading of the work. Alison Kelly elaborates: "[t]he gallery encourages the visitor to look beyond a purely art historical approach to the objects, to also focus on their religious and, in some cases, cultural significance as manifestations of living faiths."[52] The Dali painting exemplifies a living faith, speaking strongly to Christian beliefs. For many, this work evokes contemplation of Christ and his redemption. Yet, for others, the art historical value of this work supersedes its religious meaning.

The text panel complicates visitors' reading of this artwork. The panel has both held back its praise of the genius of Dali, and underscored acclaim for the work. The panel begins by describing the context for the artwork:

> This painting shows the figure of Christ, dramatically lit and foreshortened, gazing down from the cross to a beach scene with fishermen and boats below. The composition was inspired by a vision described and sketched by the Spanish mystic Carmelite friar St John of the Cross was [sic] a great reformer of his order, who helped to re-establish its original strict discipline which had been allowed to lapse. He wrote many beautiful poetic works which describe and glorify his divine experiences.

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[51] Placing the Dali painting in the Gallery of Religious Art has not lessened its value as a masterwork, but rather, it has simply recontextualized the piece. The painting is given greater status as an artwork since it is the most famous work found in St Mungo Museum.

[52] Alison Kelly, 145.

Although this first section begins by describing Dali's composition in aesthetic terms, its aloof tone does not influence the viewer to accept this work as a masterpiece. Instead, the description is used to help relate the composition to the mystic vision of St John of the Cross. The introductory sentence of this panel again speaks to this link, but does not clearly state the connection: "[a] religious image painted by a 20th century artist, which was inspired by a mystic poet who lived four centuries earlier." The text panel then conducts visual analysis of Dali's work: "Dali shows us an unblemished Christ, with no evidence of the pain and suffering usually found in crucifixion scenes. The blood, the crown of thorns – even the nails which attached him to the cross are missing." These features of Dali's Christ are those that relate to the friar's vision; however, these connections are not suggested in the text panel.

The text panel then examines Dali's motivations, providing explanations for the visual components in the work:

> The artist explained his intentions "My aesthetic ambition in this picture was completely the opposite of all the Christ's [sic] painted by most of the modern painters, who have all interpreted Him in the expressionistic and contortionist sense, thus obtaining emotion through ugliness. My principal preoccupation was that my Christ would be as beautiful as the God that He is."

This statement made by Dali paints an image of genius, suggesting that he has moved beyond convention to portray a Christ who is unusual in his beauty. Dali has not linked his work to the vision of St John of the Cross, although the work's title does, but this statement depicts Dali as creative and original. This statement's frankness also removes Dali from his own spiritual struggles. His quote not only pictures himself as a spokesman for Christianity but also is pious. There is no mention of the struggles Dali faced with the Church and his years of disbelief. It does not speak to

his forced fleeing from Spain because of a fascist regime, nor his permission to return to Spain based upon his conversion to Catholicism. It does not speak to the suspicions of many scholars and religious leaders that Dali painted this work, and many other religious icons, to suggest his devotion to the Church, but did not truly believe in Catholicism.[53] Instead, the remaining sentences in this paragraph demonstrate Dali's intelligence in depicting a symbolic Christ rather than one depicted in the Bible:

> The cross therefore, suspended in space, is shown as the principal symbol of Christianity rather than as an instrument of execution. The beach scene probably represents the Sea of Galilee, where many of Jesus's miracles occurred, but the landscape depicted was inspired by Port Lilgat in Spain, Dali's home. The 'fisherman' also relate to figure [sic] found in 17th century European paintings rather than to Palestine at the beginning of the Christian era. These facts help to relate the image firmly to St John's vision of Christ, rather than to a realistic illustration of biblical [sic] events.

Unlike other text panels found in the Gallery of Religious Art, the panel for Dali's *Christ of St John of the Cross* does not situate it within religious tradition, although Dali's statement does compare his own depiction of the image of Christ with other famous portrayals. Visitors are not told how this work operates as a Christian image. This work's connection to Christianity is made, instead, through its placement in the gallery alongside other Christian works.

The removal of this work from its understood art environment to St Mungo Museum caused an assortment of reactions from museum visitors. Some visitors argued that the aesthetic significance of the artwork had been compromised through its change of venue. This reaction reflects the ingrained understanding western viewers have of art museums, and why some visitors have difficulty viewing the

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[53] Matt Bendoris, "The Dali Code," *The Sun* (13 April 2006) Scotland 56.

artwork as a religious piece. One visitor wrote: "the presentation of Salvador Dali's crucifixion is appalling. The lighting detracts from the genius. Return the painting to Glasgow Museum where it was presented and lit perfectly."[54] Another visitor attacked the hanging of this work, again raising its aesthetic value over its religious function: "[w]hy oh why is the Dali presented so high above the floor. It must be viewed (like all Dali's work) from at least two perspectives. What a waste of opportunity . . . presented like an icon on a stained glass window.[55] This latter comment suggests that by including the Dali painting in St Mungo Museum's Gallery of Religious Art, the artistic genius of the work is reduced to mere church decoration. This visitor recognizes the religious nature of the artwork, yet feels the work is compromised by being used in this manner.

Another visitor wrote:

> I came to St Mungo's especially to show my husband Salvador Dali's painting 'Christ of St John of the Cross' truly magnificent [sic] which I saw for the first time 5 years ago. I was dismayed then as now that it is displayed in a room surrounded by objects from other religions – to me it deserves to be in a room of its own – in order that one can meditate on it and have quiet undisturbed reflection on it and the meaning behind it without any other visual distractions.[56]

This visitor's comments are shared by many. The sacred quality of this artwork speaks to some museum visitors on a spiritual level, prompting visitors to pray and meditate in front of the painting.[57] Visitors, however, describe this spiritual level in both religious and aesthetic terms. Kelvingrove senior curator Jean Walsh, suggests

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[54] From the St Mungo Museum visitor comment log. Comment number 23, dated January 30, 2003. I think this visitor meant to say Kelvingrove Museum rather than Glasgow Museum.
[55] From the St Mungo Museum visitor comment log. Comment number 1109, dated September 25, 2003.
[56] Ibid., comment 32a, dated February 1, 2003.
[57] From my conversation with Alison Kelly, 23 May 2006. She alluded to security guards speaking about witnessing these ritual moments.

Christ of St John of the Cross "means many different things to many different people. For some, seeing the painting is a religious experience, for others it is all about Dali's prowess as an artist."[58]

Yet, the inclusion of Dali's *Christ of St John of the Cross* has played a critical role in establishing the Gallery of Religious Art's claim to be a gallery of art. With its fame as a masterwork, the Dali painting works in tandem with the conventions of display used in the gallery to communicate to visitors that this space is an art gallery. However, while affirming the gallery's position as an art gallery, the Dali painting also hinders the success of the gallery to increase awareness of other religions. Many visitors to St Mungo Museum take advantage of free admission and visit the Gallery of Religious Art simply to see the Dali painting, and then leave without giving a second glance to the other religious objects or galleries.

The Dali no longer graces the walls of St Mungo Museum. Instead, on 11 July 2006, *Christ of St John of the Cross* greeted visitors at the grand reopening of the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, where it is now placed alongside other masterworks. In this new location, the Dali is hung at the end of a long corridor on the west balcony. It appears to be at the nave of a church; however, hidden from the viewers' first sighting of the Dali are nineteenth century Scottish landscapes and paintings from World War Two.[59] Although the work has left the religious context of St Mungo Museum, the media describe this move as a return of Dali's *Christ of St*

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[58] Marianne Taylor, "Glasgow's love affair with Dali's GBP8200 masterpiece TV show celebrates city's most famous painting," *Evening Times,* 11 April 2006.
[59] Tim Cornwell, "Exhibitionist tendencies," *The Scotsman,* Saturday 20 May 2006.

John of the Cross to its "spiritual home."[60] This media reaction has inscribed the art museum, and the hanging of the Dali in this environment, with animated spiritual language—a reaction not matched by the works location in St Mungo Museum, a museum devoted to religion, and therefore, things spiritual. This response indicates that to many, the Dali is sacred as an artistic work, and the Kelvingrove Museum is the cathedral to view the artwork in. It is ironic, therefore, that the context of religion provided by St Mungo Museum has not evoked this spiritual language from the media, suggesting that viewers choose to consider this piece in the secularized space of the art museum.

Multiple Meanings:

As the multi-layered interpretations of objects in the Gallery of Religious Art suggests, it is the museum's devotion to the subject of religion that complicates the secular meanings of objects. The Ganesha sculpture, which ushers the museum visitor into the Gallery of Religious Art, represents both an artistic treasure and a religious statue through its inclusion in the gallery (figure 20). Does a Hindu visiting the gallery disregard the latter meaning because the Ganesha is shown in a gallery of art? The tie the Gallery of Religious Art has to faith prevents visitors from ignoring the object's religious meaning. Indeed, the text panels reinforce this complexity, describing the Ganesha as "a modern image of the Hindu god Ganesha, son of Shiva and the goddess Parvati, whose paunch indicates his association with success and plenty." Although the Ganesha is praised for its artistic merit through its inclusion in

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[60] "Dali piece returns to Kelvingrove," *BBC News Online*, 2 June 2006.

the gallery, its religious function is highlighted in the panel.[61] This attachment of the art object to its religious purpose spurred the Hindu community to organize a blessing ceremony for the work as it entered the gallery.[62] To insist on blessing an art object, one that was specifically commissioned by the museum, suggests the Hindu community connects sacred qualities to the artwork, despite its location in the museum.

> These type of reactions motivated Ivan Gaskell to argue:
> Museums might do well to reassess the Enlightenment assumptions under which they operate that aesthetic and educational criteria alone justify the abstraction of sacred objects from their devotional or otherwise sacred contexts for deployment in an entirely secular domain.[63]

Gaskell explores the response of the New York Tibetan community to the Newark Museum's commissioning of a Buddhist altar for its collection, a reaction similar to the Hindu community's at St Mungo Museum. This commission reflects the Newark Museum staff's interest in exploring its Tibetan collections further, by displaying sacred Buddhist artifacts in their traditional environment, on an altar. Through this project, the "altar was not conceived as a stage setting, but as a true religious structure. This was emphasized in the most authoritative manner possible, for the altar was consecrated by the Dalai Lama himself."[64] Because of the act of consecration, the museum's altar is an active spiritual object in the eyes of the Tibetan community. In this same manner, objects in the Gallery of Religious Art resonate with their own spiritual qualities.

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[61] Art objects are chosen for the Gallery of Religious Art based upon their ability to be both "stunning and pertinent." From my interview with Alison Kelly, 23 May, 2005.
[62] Chris Arthur, "Exhibiting the Sacred," 18.
[63] Ivan Gaskell, "Sacred to Profane and Back Again," *Art and its Publics: Museum Studies at the Millennium*, Andrew McClellan, ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 152.
[64] Ibid., 154.

The complexity of meaning attributed to objects in the Gallery of Religious Art, with artworks reflecting both sacred and secular qualities in St Mungo Museum, makes it a difficult space to analyze. Mark O'Neill's discussion of this gallery reflects this challenge as his description oscillates between defining the space with language associated with an art gallery and that of religion. St Mungo Museum's unique position as the first museum devoted entirely to the theme of religion prevents curators from describing their museum with a known vocabulary. O'Neill begins by explaining this space in aesthetic terms: "[t]he main room would be the art gallery where we would show objects that communicated something of the meaning of the religions they represent directly through their aesthetic power."[65] Thus, O'Neill proposes that the artworks in the Gallery of Religious Art be considered as works of art. He speaks of the objects' power to communicate meaning through aesthetics. In this instance, the liminal or transforming experience described by Duncan is manifest through an awareness of genius and reason. However, O'Neill does not limit the Gallery of Religious Art to an aesthetic experience; his description of the Gallery of Religious Art suggests that the gallery move beyond convention to capture and exhibit the sacred, spiritual power contained in the artworks:

> The museum is not the result of systematic collection of religious objects, but draws upon Glasgow Museums' great reserve collections of anthropology, fine and decorative art, and local history. It goes beyond these disciplines, by trying to display the objects in such a way that they retain some of their spiritual power, blurring the boundary between the disciplines and between secular and sacred.[66]

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[65] Mark O'Neill, "Exploring the meaning of life: the St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art," *Museums International* 47, no. 185 (November 1, 1995): 50.
[66] Ibid., 50.

O'Neill's comments suggest that St Mungo Museum's overarching focus on religion complicates our understanding of the object as representing secular meaning in the museum. Instead, objects found in the Gallery of Religious Art are presented as objects of art based upon the methods used to display them. O'Neill's comment, however, demonstrates the interconnectedness found between sacred and secular in this museum space: objects both speak to the tangible aspects of aesthetics and the intangible aspects of belief.

Conclusion:

The institutional identity of St Mungo Museum, as a museum of religion, creates a lens by which to view the objects on display. The process of secularizing museum objects, which happened in universal survey museums and art galleries, is not complete in the Gallery of Religious Art. The institutional context of St Mungo Museum emphasizes the sacred meaning historically ascribed to religious objects. Thus, in this first known museum of religion, visitors encounter objects in the Gallery of Religious Art with both religious and aesthetic meaning.

While the focus of this chapter is upon the blurring of aesthetic and sacred meanings found in the Gallery of Religious Art, we will see that the Gallery of Religious Life is a juxtaposition of the Gallery of Religious Art. In the next chapter, I will explore how religious objects are used to speak to ritual practice to emphasize the connection of religion to every day life. These two gallery spaces work collectively to demonstrate how different religions have shared ritual and artistic practice.

Chapter 1 Figure List

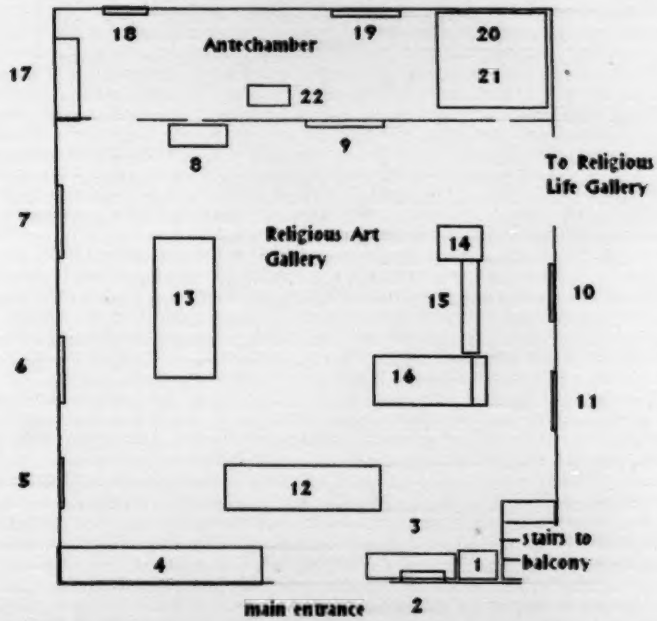

Figure 8: sketch of the floor plan of the Gallery of Religious Art

1. Nigerian Ancestral Screen (On a plinth)
2. *Kangaroo Wild Cabbage, Ceremonial Spear, Possum and Brush Carrot Dreaming* (hung)
3. Bench
4. Chilkat Blanket (behind a glass case) and the back of the Ganesha statue
5. Stained Glass window from the Glasgow Churches and the Burrell Collection (built into wall)
6. Stained Glass window from the Glasgow Churches and the Burrell Collection (built into wall)
7. Stained Glass window from the Glasgow Churches and the Burrell Collection (built into wall)
8. Mary Statue (in a case on a plinth)
9. *Christ of St. John of the Cross*, Salvador Dali, 1951. (hung)
10. Stained Glass window from the Glasgow Churches and the Burrell Collection (built into wall)
11. Stained Glass window from the Glasgow Churches and the Burrell Collection (built into wall)
12. Display case with Porcelain bowl painted with Taoist immortals, *Theseus and the Minotaur, Hermes,* and Bi Disc
13. Display Case with: Buddha Shakyamani (two of them) and the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara
14. Egyptian Mummy Mask (in a display case, on a plinth)
15. Bench
16. Turkish Prayer Rug (displayed raised off the floor) and *The Attributes of Divine Perfection* by Ahmed Moustafa (mounted above the rug).
17. Plaquettes depicting the crucifixion, entombment, and resurrection of Christ by Galleazzo Mondella (in a display case)
18. *Coronation of the Virgin* stained glass (built into the wall)
19. *Sabbath Candles* by Dora Holzander (hung on the wall)
20. Stained Glass Saint (built into the wall)
21. Shiva As Nataraja (mounted on a plinth, displayed with coloured lights, behind a glass wall)
22. Pietà Group (on a plinth, in a glass case).

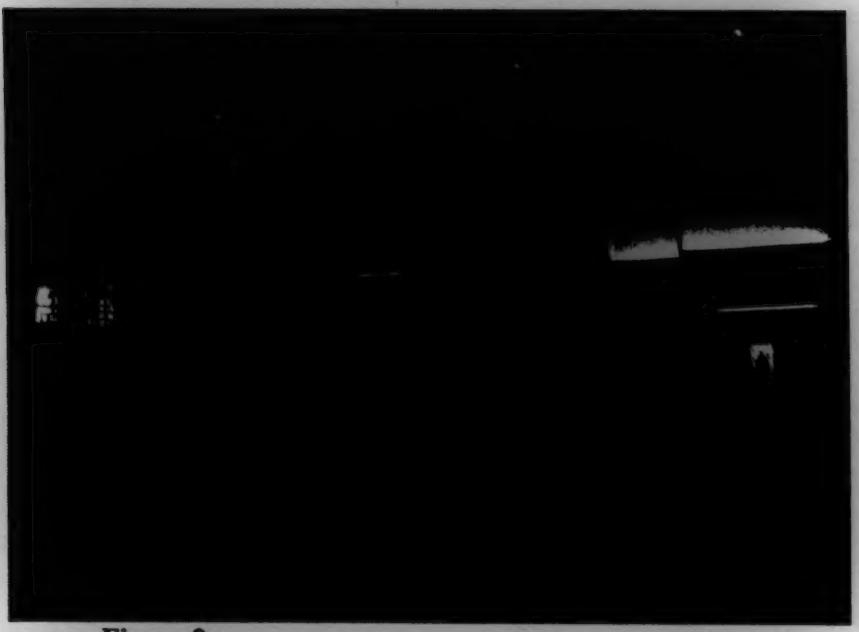

Figure 9
19th Century Chilkat Blanket, (North American West Cost Aboriginal Art)
Gallery of Religious Art, St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art

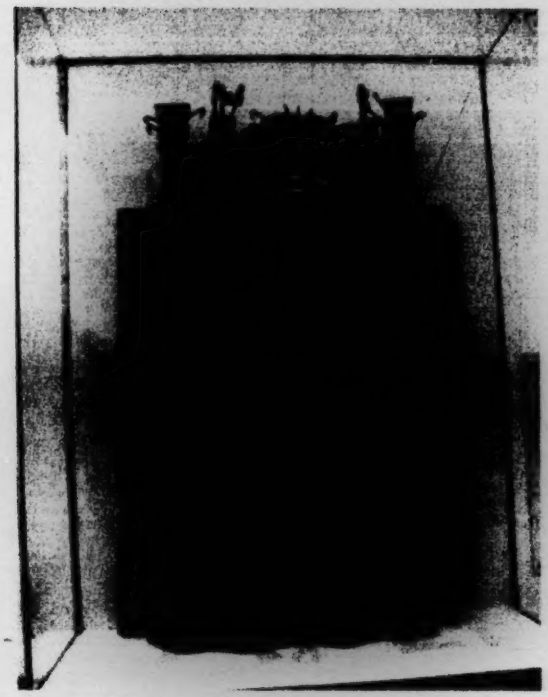

Figure 10
Nigerian Ancestral Screen
Gallery of Religious Art,
St Mungo Museum of
Religious Life and Art

Figure 11
Kangaroo Wild Cabbage, Ceremonial Spear, Possum and Brush Carrot Dreaming
(20th Century Australian Aboriginal Work)
Gallery of Religious Art, St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art

Figure 12
Display case of art objects from the Ancient World
Gallery of Religious Art, St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art

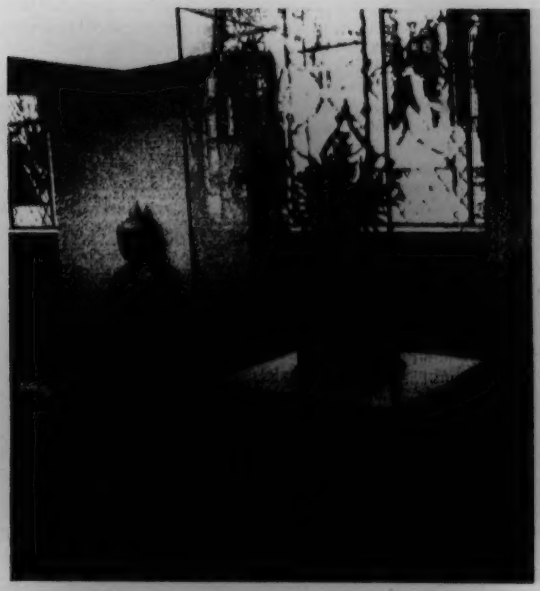

Figure 13
Budda Shakyamani and the *Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara*
Gallery of Religious Art, St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art

Figure 14
Turkish Prayer Rug and *The Attributes of Divine Perfection* by Ahmed Moustafa
Gallery of Religious Art, St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art

Figure 15
Elijah, made by JT and Charles Stewart, 1911
Gallery of Religious Art, St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art

Figure 16
Salvador Dali, *Christ of St. John of the Cross*,
1951 Oil on Canvas

Figure 17
View of *Christ of St. John of the Cross*
from the balcony
Gallery of Religious Art, 2005.

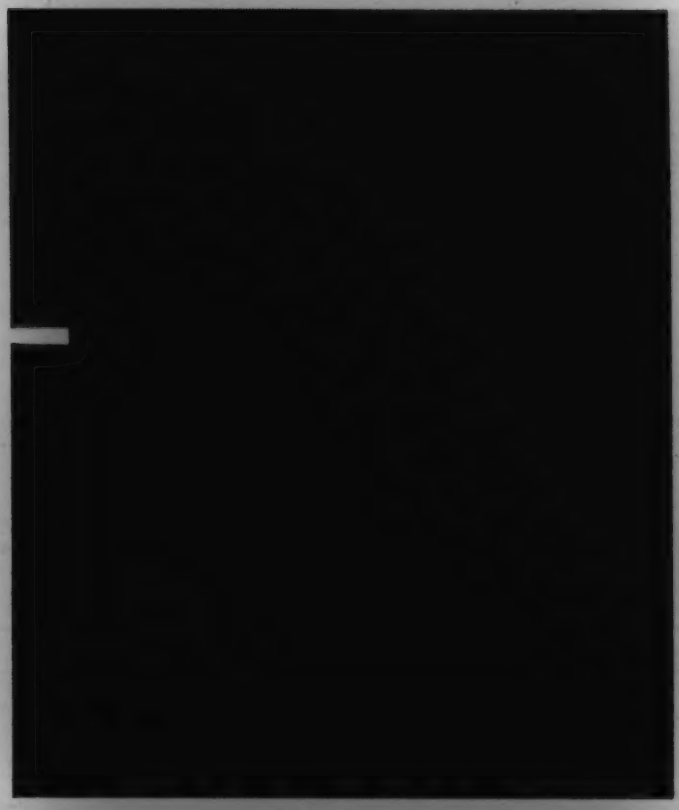

Figure 18
Sabbath Candles
Dora Holzhandler
Gallery of Religious Art, 2005
St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art

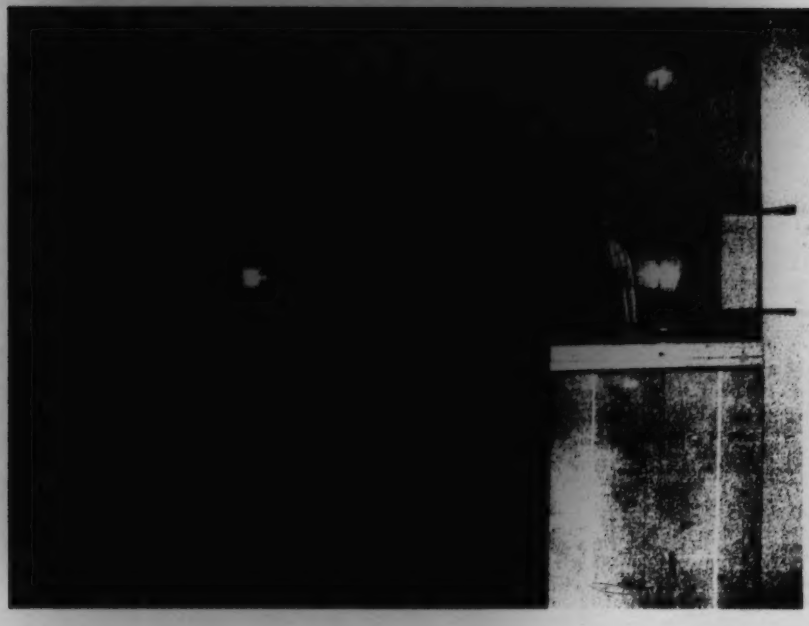

Figure 19
View of the Shiva As Nataraja and the Alabaster Pietà figurine
Gallery of Religious Art, 2005
St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art.

Figure 20
The back of Ganesha, view from the Gallery of Religious Art
St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art

All photographs were taken in May 2005 by the author.

Chapter 2: Using Objects to Explore the Meaning of Life (Itself) in The Gallery of Religious Life

In the Gallery of Religious Art, the aesthetic value of objects is conveyed through a style of exhibition that emphasized the uniqueness of the object by isolating it on the wall or placing it on a pedestal. In contrast, the Gallery of Religious Life wants to demonstrate the place of religious objects in every day life and accomplishes this by including more didactic material that speaks to the role of objects in religious rituals. Religious ritual, like the artistic practice examined in the Gallery of Religious Art, is a physical expression of religious belief and reveals much about humankind; Roy A. Rappaport describes ritual as "the social act basic to humanity."[67] The editors of the journal *Material Religion* link religion to living, describing it as "a phenomenon that affects every aspect of human life, and its material expression is found everywhere."[68] The Gallery of Religious Life reflects these two insights, arguing that ritual and religion are central to daily life. Arguably, while the religious objects are used in the Gallery of Religious Art to speak to aesthetics, objects are used as material evidence of ritual practice in the Gallery of Religious Life—to connect objects to actual religious belief and link belief with religious life. Through this exploration, curators intend to show visitors that people of faith participate in similar ritual practices in their effort to make sense of and celebrate stages of human life. Objects are central to the advancement of this narrative but are made relevant to

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[67] Roy A. Rappaport, *Ritual & Religion in the Making of Humanity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 31.
[68] "Editorial Statement," *Material Religion* 1, issue 1 (2005), 8.

people through the inclusion of testimonial statements and photographs. This latter step is necessary for visitors to connect the physical act of ritual practice with the material evidence of these proceedings. Visitors are introduced to the gallery's ritual focus by the introductory text panel:

> From birth to death and beyond rituals mark the different stages of human life. Through prayer, meditation, singing, music and dance, people try to approach the sacred. Religious beliefs sometimes reinforce the social order and at other times cause revolution, war, and death. Religion can also inspire people to live better lives, so they may receive blessings now or be prepared for the afterlife.[69]

While many objects used in the Gallery of Religious Life are arguably interchangeable with objects displayed in the Gallery of Religious Art, ritual meaning is emphasized through display in the Gallery of Religious Life.

The Meaning of Life (Itself)

Lofty ideals and hope-filled dreams seem to characterize the original goals of the Gallery of Religious Life. Then Senior Curator, Mark O'Neill described the gallery's founding vision in 1995, suggesting:

> [it] would serve local people, for all of whom religion was part of their cultural background, even though many were no longer believers. For the staff it was an opportunity to display some of our most powerful objects, but not in an anaemic way. It would allow us to combat racism, by showing some of the glories of the cultures of the city's ethnic minorities in a world context. It would allow us to explore a fascinating subject rarely addressed in museums – the meaning of life itself![70]

This curatorial intention for the Gallery of Religious Life was shaped by the institutional mandate to "encourage mutual respect and understanding among people

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[69] From the opening text panel of the Gallery of Religious Life, as it appeared May 2005.
[70] Mark O'Neill, "Exploring the meaning of Life: the St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art," *Museums International (Unesco Paris)* 47, no 1 (1995), 50.

of different faiths and none." Yet, O'Neill's statement suggests a desire to move the gallery beyond the parameters of the mandate, to do more than encourage mutual respect. O'Neill and his team envisioned this gallery as capable of combating racism and selected Glasgow Museums' "most powerful objects" to facilitate in this intervention. O'Neill's comment reveals the value the museum places upon objects in its collection, suggesting that they are a bridge between museum visitors and Glasgow's ethnic minorities—treasuring these objects because of their ability to speak to ritual practice, and thus human life. These objects are used in the Gallery of Religious Life to demonstrate aspects of religious belief held by ethnic minorities. Curators intend to reduce the religious tension found in Glasgow through the meaning generated from the display of the ritual objects. Curators impose upon the gallery's objects the ability to transmit knowledge of ritual practice, and in tandem with the context in which the object is displayed, demonstrate the comparative beliefs of people from different religious practices.

The Gallery of Religious Life is a small cave-like space. It is accessible to the visitor only through the Gallery of Religious Art, where a single door serves as both the entrance and exit to the space. There are no windows in this space; instead, the dark colour of the walls and the small size of the gallery make visible the many cramped display cases lining the walls and also filling the interior of the room (figure 21). Along the outer walls of the gallery are display cases exploring the human life cycle, where each display case examines one of the many steps of this cycle: birth and childhood, the coming of age, sex and marriage, war and peace, and death. Displays devoted to divine rule and the afterlife are placed in the middle of the gallery, back to

back with cases exploring the gallery's second theme, the six major world religions. Each topic is given its own display case, and is analyzed by the combined use of text panels, objects, testimonials, and photographs. Sandwiched between the life cycle cases are handsets playing recorded testimonials of faith believers and large photographs of faith adherents participating in ritual. The second theme developed in the Gallery of Religious Life is an investigation of the six major world religions: Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and Sikhism, explored individually in tiny display cases. They are presented alphabetically, so as to not favour one religion above another.[71]

The development of these two themes—the human life cycle and the six major world religions—was proposed to fulfill O'Neill's vision to have the gallery address how religion is central to life's meaning. These two thematic threads work in tandem to explore in greater detail how ritual and religion are central to every day life. While the study of the six world religions is first made obviously visible to visitors through the individual cases in the Gallery of Religious Life, the focus on these religions is not unique to this gallery. Instead, art objects are loosely organized around religious affiliation in the Gallery of Religious Art, where Christian art is hung together, Buddhist statuary is displayed in the same row, and the Islamic prayer rug is shown alongside Moustafa's calligraphy work. In the Scottish Life Gallery, discovery boxes on each of the world religions have been installed in front of the main display cases (figure 22). Yet, the inclusion of cases on the six major world religions is imperative

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[71] Antonia Lovelace, from Antonia Lovelace, Elizabeth Carnegie, and Harry Dunlop "St Mungo's Museum of Religious Life and Art: A New Development in Glasgow," *Journal of Museum Ethnography* 7 (1995): 67.

to the Gallery of Religious Life. In this space, the holistic examination of these religions draws attention to the commonalities existing between each faith group, thus enriching the narrative of the gallery.

The use of objects in these display cases reflects the greater tendency in the museum community to use tangible items to speak to religion. The editors of the journal *Material Religion* note:

> New to the study of religion today, therefore, is the enthusiastic interest among scholars in every humanistic and social-scientific discipline, among curators and museum directors in private and public institutions, and among large numbers of the general public to learn what material culture can tell them about the lived experience of religion.[72]

In the Gallery of Religious Life, objects are used in conjunction with photographs and testimonials to reveal the ritual nature of religion. Objects are used both to examine the specific world religions and explore the broader theme of the life cycle by highlighting similar religious practices experienced by people of faith.

Arguably, the gallery's comparative examination of the rituals practiced by people of faith as a part of the life cycle theme allows curators an opportunity to present visitors with similarities found in different faiths. This approach provides a broader field to investigate the influence of religion on daily life than a singular focus on each of the world religions would have allowed. The latter interest limits the museum's achievement of its mandate, as by focusing entirely on world religions, difference rather than similarity would surface from this analysis. Instead, by focusing upon the theme of the life cycle, curators were able to extend the borders of their investigation of religious life by integrating faiths, such as the Bahá'i, Wicca,

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[72]"Editorial Statement," *Material Religion*, 4.

and paganism, which fall outside of the parameters of major world faiths, but are actively practiced by Glaswegians.

The Human Life Cycle: Investigating the Birth Display Case:

An investigation of the Birth case elucidates the nature of the display cases operating under the banner of the life cycle theme. In this display case, the curatorial team selected objects that reflect ritual practices associated with birth (figure 23). The first group of figures in the Birth case presents objects relating to conception and birth. These include a fertility figure worn by Asante women of West Africa, an Egyptian figurine of *Isis with Horus*, a statuette of the Chinese Boddhisattva *Guan-Yin with Child*, a goddess who is worshiped by those wanting children, a plate depicting Adam and Eve, relating Eve's consequent pain in childbirth to her punishment for eating the apple, and a medieval statue of the Virgin Mary with Christ. The second group of objects is made up of gifts given to new parents and babies. These include christening gifts such as a decorated plate, a silver plated money box in the shape of a bootie, and a mug with the rhyme "Monday's Child" written on it, a christening gown, a lucky sword given to male babies in China to keep away evil spirits, and a tiny ceramic figurine of a baby called a Blessing Doll. Also included in this display are greeting cards given to new babies and a baptismal font. These objects are placed on shelves built into the case or are mounted on angled ledges. This latter approach is used to display the christening gown, which is draped across the slanting ledge, making visible the elaborate length of the gown. The

greeting cards are propped up on a ledge and their display is reminiscent of cards exhibited in a home setting.

The presentation of objects in the Birth case differs greatly from the display of objects in the Gallery of Religious Art, where visitors move from object to object in a linear and logical fashion, and objects are presented individually, in their own cases or in their own space on the wall. In the Birth display case, objects are displayed collectively. For example, visitors experience objects from Christianity exhibited along-side a pagan fertility necklace, and a Chinese good luck sword. The autonomy granted objects in the Gallery of Religious Art does not transfer to objects present in the life cycle cases of the Gallery of Religious Life. The different approach is significant to the narrative of the Gallery of Religious Life. Instead of displaying objects to enhance an aesthetic meaning, objects are used to demonstrate their link to ritual. Objects are shown together in the Birth case to emphasize the many different approaches used to acknowledge and celebrate childbirth. This choice in display provides visitors the opportunity to view an assortment of ritual objects representative of multiple faiths. Through increased awareness of similarity and difference, O'Neill encourages visitors to grow in their understanding and respect of other faith groups. Yet, while visitors are exposed to multiple faith objects in these display cases, and may see objects relating to birth rituals that are unfamiliar to them, the lack of accompanying textual information fails to clarify the purposes and intentions of the objects. While many visitors might feel that they have learned something new by seeing the male baby lucky sword or the fertility necklace, others might view these objects as bizarre and different from their own experience of birth rituals. By limiting

textual information, the objects found in the packed case are reminiscent of objects found in cabinets of curiosity because of their display. These objects evoke wonder, but not necessarily understanding and respect, which are the end points that O'Neill and his curatorial team desire.

In contrast to the Gallery of Religious Art, the autonomy of works is not the desired effect in the Gallery of Religious Life. Instead, objects are used to collectively represent the larger theme of birth. If autonomy was granted each object, the thematic organization of the cases would be lost, and the narrative of the gallery would be unachievable. Thus, while lighting was used in the Gallery of Religious Art as a way to emphasize the individual nature of each artwork, lighting is used conservatively in the Gallery of Religious Life, primarily as means to illuminate the case as a whole. The black backgrounds of the cases make the reflections of the lights and the visitors more visible in the glass of the display, therefore, highlighting visitors as well as the objects. This unusual inclusion of visitors in the glass advances the gallery's narrative by reinforcing the visitors' own need to consider their spiritual beliefs in relation to those of other people.

Text paneling within the display cases, too, reinforces the curatorial intention to not view these objects as individual, but rather as integral pieces of a puzzle that help make sense of the whole. The main text to the Birth case states:

> For believers every new life is a reminder of the original creation. When holy beings become human they may be conceived and born in exceptional ways, accompanied by sacred signs. The power of female fertility may be revered or the woman seen as a passive vessel. In everyday life, both mother and baby receive special treatment before, during and after birth. The baby is

> introduced to society and the faith through ceremonies like name-giving, infant baptism and circumcision.[73]

By examining many rituals associated with birth, the curatorial team has prevented the privileging of one faith over another. This is essential to the narrative of the gallery, which argues for respect for different faith practices. Object labels provide limited information about the object, so as to not detract from the display case's larger narrative or to focus visitors upon single objects. The object label for the *Isis and Horus* statue makes visible the briefness of the texts. It states:

> The Egyptian goddess Isis nursing Horus, the child she had with her brother, Osiris, Lord of the Underworld.
>
> Horus founded the royal house of Egypt. Following this example the Egyptian pharaohs also married their sisters.[74]

Visitors are given a minimal amount of information regarding what the *Isis and Horus* statue means to the pantheistic Egyptian faith, since the text only describes who the figures are in the statue, and links it to religion in Egypt. The label refrains from commenting upon materials or artistic practice or how Egyptians use this figurine because the curators intend for this object to work in conjunction with other objects that speak about birth rituals. The construction of the object, therefore, is secondary to its ritual focus.

Interspersed among the many objects of the display cases are short statements of belief made by Glaswegians. These testimonials, accompanied by the speaker's photographs, are used to create links between the ritual objects and actual religious

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[73] As the text panel appeared, May 2005.
[74] As the object label read May 2005.

practices. For example, Mrs. Bashir, a Muslim Glaswegian, is cited describing Islamic birth rituals:

> According to Islam if a girl is born you should sacrifice a cow or a goat or if it is a boy you should sacrifice two lambs or two goats. When a new-born baby comes a very nice and good person should give him a little bit of honey or a sweet thing, just a tiny bit with the finger so that your son or daughter should be like.[75]

The testimonials operate in tandem with the objects found in the birth display case. Like the objects, these testimonials provide only a brief image of faith, yet when placed along side the objects, they speak to the intangible nature of ritual practice, presenting visitors with forms of ritual practice not represented by the gallery's objects. These testimonials tell stories, thereby enriching the display case by providing a human connection between objects and actual ritual practice. In this way, the testimonials, text panels, and objects work together to animate the larger theme of birth rituals.

The Birth display is organized similarly to the other display cases comprising the life cycle theme. Each theme is given its own display case except the Birth and Childhood case, in which each topic is given half of a larger case to develop the theme. Some cases have more objects than others, and some cases contain more diverse religious material, while others explore the ritual objects of just one or two faiths. The case on Sex and Marriage, for example, dominantly examines Hindu and Christian marriage customs by displaying two mannequins, one wearing a Christian wedding dress and the other a Sari. The delicacy of the construction of these two gowns distracts visitors from paying much attention to the other objects in the case

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[75] Testimonial statement, May 2005.

(figure 24). The case on Health, Hope, and Happiness, however, uses fewer objects but more photographs and descriptions to investigate shamanism. In this case, the healing beliefs associated with the six major world religions are overlooked in favour of a discussion of tribal beliefs.

The thematic structure of the Gallery of Religious Life allows curators the opportunity to draw from Glasgow Museums' assorted collection of objects, using items that are not usually shown in a gallery such as baptismal cards, video games, or crocheted nativity figurines. Yet, the inclusion of these items draws the attention of visitors to the influence of spirituality on everyday activities—we give cards, play games, and decorate our houses without always connecting the activity to ritual. This insertion of everyday objects does not detract from the quality of the displays, but instead reinforces the link that spirituality plays in daily living. Visitors are reminded that ritual penetrates daily living and its affects are seen everywhere.

Investigating the Six World Religions:

While the life cycle cases explore religious life by examining the day-to-day nature of ritual, the cases devoted to the six major world religions use material objects to explain a specific faith, and to reveal characteristics of the religious groups which created them. Their meaning, therefore, is linked specifically to their identity as ritual objects. Like the life cycle display cases, the cases explaining the world religions are object-directed, and are crammed with religious material. Objects appear both along the back of the case and are mounted to the cases' sides because of the limited exhibition space. All six cases follow a similar exhibition design. While each of

these cases is equally important in its exploration of faith, a detailed examination of the Buddhism case reveals the exhibition techniques used to display world faiths in this gallery (figure 25 and 26).

Using Objects to speak to Buddhism:

The Buddhism case is framed by a text panel which provides a short history of the foundation of the Buddhist faith. Visitors learn about Siddhartha Gautama and his contribution to Buddhist belief and the subsequent journey Buddhists undertake to achieve nirvana, or the desired state of bliss and release from karma achieved by the end of individuality. This background information helps visitors understand the importance of the ritual objects and the display in the larger context of Buddhism.[76]

The objects displayed in the Buddhism case represent diverse ritual activity. Many objects were created to remind believers to pray or to assist believers in prayer. These include prayer flags, a prayer wheel, prayer beads, and an image of a prayer offering. Objects also represent ritual through their association with religious ceremony: including a priest's headdress, a bell and drum, a text ribbon, and ritual texts. Images of spiritual leaders engaged in ritual practice form an important component of the Buddhism display. Two sculptures of Buddha appear: one depicts Buddha seated in meditation, and the other shows the moment just prior to him achieving enlightenment. The ritual goal of achieving nirvana is further represented

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[76] From the text panel as it appeared in May 2005. The panel reads: "Siddhartha Gautama, who was the Buddha, or Enlightened One, lived in Northern India probably in the 6th century BCE. He left his wealthy family and after seven years of meditation finally found enlightenment. He believed that people are held captive by suffering. Only by renouncing their own desires can they hope to achieve nirvana, and be released from the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. To do this the Buddha taught his followers to keep Noble Eight Fold Path or right intention, right action and right wisdom."

through the inclusion of images of Bodhisattvas, beings "who are about to become enlightened who have delayed this in order to help others towards nirvana."[77] Finally, the Stupa of the Shwe Dagon Pagoda involves ritual through the act of creation, as to build a stupa (a mound shaped shrine) is considered "an act of generosity and can bring great merit."[78]

Through their location in the Gallery of Religious Life, accompanied by text panels, and shallow lighting, these objects are inscribed with ritual meaning through their display, and are presented similarly to objects in the life cycle display cases. Objects are placed on ledges to enhance their visibility. Labels are used to briefly explain the ritual nature of the objects. The label for the Bodhisattva reads:

> ...This Tibetan Bodhisattva wears a crown and lotus earrings and sits in front of a flaming arch canopy. The hands are joined in meditation in the mudra or posture known a [sic] dhyana. The Chinese inscription dates the Bodhisattva to around 1760 CE.

The complex and intricate nature of Buddhism is simplified to a generic overview of the religion in this display case. Spatial limitations prevent curators from examining the different sects associated with Buddhism, and exploring in detail the philosophical and practical beliefs linked to Buddhism. Instead, the curators have selected objects from their collection which represent Buddhist ritual practice. While the curators show visitors ritual objects, and briefly describe the objects' association to Buddhism, they fail to describe how these objects fit into the larger context of daily life of the practicing Buddhist. Furthermore, these objects, many of which were produced in the nineteenth century or earlier, create an antiquated view of Buddhism. Yet, while the

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[77] From the object label text for the Bodhisattva.
[78] From the object label text for the Stupa.

display fails to draw its discussion of Buddhism to the present day, it does speak to the history of Buddhism, giving Buddhism claim to its long practice as a world religion. The photographs interspersed throughout the display case link Buddhism with Asia by specifically depicting Burmese Buddhists participating in ritual. However, this does not create a link with Glaswegians, the museum's target audience. A single quote from Amy Lowe reminds visitors that Buddhism is, in fact, a religious practice actively pursued in the United Kingdom. Additional information is not provided for visitors desiring to learn more about Buddhism.

The display cases of the six major world religions do serve an important function in developing the larger narrative of the gallery, however. While the textual information is limited, and space constraints prevent curators from providing a detailed examination of these faiths, these cases do speak to the diversity of faiths found within Glasgow. By looking at these cases, visitors are able to make comparisons between these religions. For example, each case presents visitors with the sacred texts of the faith and the names given to religious leaders. In this regard, visitors are able to use correct language when speaking about the world religions, a gesture of respect, reflective of gained understanding.

The cases on the six world religions operate in conjunction with the life cycle thematic display cases to demonstrate the similarities that exist between people of faith. Display is used to emphasize parallels between faiths, and objects are thus selected for their ability to convey this idea. However, it is the method of presenting these objects that stresses the ritual nature of the objects. The inclusion of statues of Buddha in both the Gallery of Religious Art and the Gallery of Religious Life

provides an opportunity to further explore how the mode of display affects visitors' interpretation of the meaning or significance of the objects. Each of these religious objects presents the same historical figure of Gautama, the Buddha, seated in meditation, but the meaning differs greatly from one gallery to the other.

The Interchangeable Buddha:

In the Gallery of Religious Art two Buddha Shakyamuni statues (figure 27) are accompanied by lengthy descriptions (see Appendix 1 for the full text). The first object label for the Buddha begins by describing the appearance of the figure, equating his expression with his approach to nirvana. The sitting pose of the Buddha with his hand outstretched is characterized as a common image in Buddhism, as is evidenced by the three examples of this statue found in St Mungo Museum. These visual cues representing Buddha Shakyamani are elaborated upon in the second text describing Buddha. In this text, the physical appearance of Buddha is explained, such as the ears and hair, but the history of the visual image is also described. From this text visitors are shown the evolutionary cycle the image of Buddha has undergone, linking its early depictions as a symbol rather than as a representational image. The complex lacquer technique used to construct Buddha figurines is described to visitors in the first text. These texts provide references to both religious ceremony and spiritual values, but also elaborate upon the aesthetic nature of these objects. The display of the Buddhas, one in a vitrine and the other mounted on a plinth reinforces the plastic nature of these statues. Through individual spotlighting, these Buddhas are given autonomy. Although they represent the same figure, each statue is given

individual status through its own exhibition space and text label. This is further suggested by the large gap separating each sculpture.

The statue of the meditating Buddha included in the Buddhism display case in the Gallery of Religious Life (figure 26) is not given such autonomy. It is exhibited alongside many other objects representing Buddhism, tightly squeezed into a small and crowded display case. The text panel explaining this statue reads:

> This image shows Gautama, the Buddha seated in meditation.
>
> His right hand is in the mudra or posture bhumisparsha, calling the earth to witness his many good acts. He has the long earlobes of a prince and the rounded head bump or ushnisha which symbolizes enlightenment. This 19th century Burmese Buddha wears the simple robes of a monk which leave the right shoulder bare, but the robe edge and his hairline have been decorated with inlaid mirror work.

The text label is much shorter and more direct than the object labels provided for the Buddhas on display in the Gallery of Religious Art. It quickly summarizes the main religious history of the work, reflecting upon the importance of Buddha's posture. From this description, the label briefly outlines the main visual elements linking this statue to a Buddha figurine. Finally, the text concludes with a curt statement describing the materials used to construct the image.

While this last statement illustrates the object's aesthetic characteristics, the Buddha found in the Gallery of Religious Life is not given aesthetic status in the Buddhism display. Instead, this statue operates as part of a larger display case exploring the religious values and history of Buddhism. The text label describes visual elements, not to praise the craftsmanship of the object, but rather to demonstrate that this work adheres to the visually understood concept of Buddha.

While the text label locates the Buddha's meaning within the larger context of the theme of Buddha, the method used to display the Buddha reinforces its meaning as a ritual object connected to Buddhism. It is not treated as a single art object the way its counterparts are displayed in the Gallery of Religious Art. It is not individually lit, nor exhibited in its own space. Instead of giving this work autonomy through display, the curatorial team has used this object to speak to the larger topic of Buddhism. This work becomes a piece in the puzzle, used as a clue to help visitors understand the ritual nature of Buddhism. Its meaning as a ritual object is reinforced by its location next to other ritual objects connected to Buddhism, all found within the same display case.

Arguably, the three Buddha statues are interchangeable from one gallery to the other. Had either of the figures presented in the Gallery of Religious Art been placed in the Gallery of Religious Life, the aesthetic nature of the artwork would become secondary to the more important exploration of ritual in the understanding of Buddhism. In the same way, the Buddha of the Gallery of Religious Life is transferable to the Gallery of Religious Art. By relocating the statue to the Gallery of Religious Art, the Buddha gains aesthetic value through the context of the gallery and the method of display.

Using the Non-tangible to Shape Narrative:

While objects figure dominantly in this gallery, it is not exclusively object-directed. Instead, non-tangible elements are used in combination with material objects to increase visitors' knowledge and experience of ritual. By including first

person narration, or photographs of people participating in ritual, visitors are made aware of the active practice of these faith traditions in Glasgow: religious adherents are connected to these objects of faith. This technique advances the narrative of the gallery, reinforcing the idea that people engage in ritual as part of their daily lives. Exhibition decisions such as the inclusion of photographs, video media, testimonials, and Forum of Faith Declaration, as well as the size and colour of the room, reinforce this first person contact.

Photographs of people participating in rituals are displayed throughout the gallery, acting as bridges between display cases. These photographs come to the museum from three sources: from the Barnaby Photo Library, from the Magnum group, who held an exhibition of some of these photos in Glasgow's MacLellan Galleries prior to St Mungo Museum's opening, and from a book of photographs, *The Circle of Life*, edited by David Cohen and published in 1991.[79] These photographs provide intimate views of specific religious experiences, such as an Australian Aborigine baby being moved through the smoke of a fire in a birth ritual ceremony, a Christian wedding ceremony, nuns participating in their wedding ceremony to Christ, a priest carrying away the body of a man belonging to the Orange Order in the aftermath of Bloody Sunday, and a young Egyptian girl undergoing a clitoridectomy in Cairo. These images, Lovelace argues, "play an important role in the comparative gallery, making the displays seem more alive or peopled."[80] Seeing visual images of people participating in ritual enlivens the ritual practices represented by the display

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[79] See Antonia Lovelace from : Antonia Lovelace, Elizabeth Carnegie, and Harry Dunlop "St Mungo's Museum of Religious Life and Art: A New Development in Glasgow," *Journal of Museum Ethnography* 7 (1995), 68 and 73.
[80] Ibid., 68.

cases and the objects. The photographs, like the testimonials found in the display cases, demonstrate that people actively participate in ritual and animate the objects through their connection to real life. The inclusion of these photographs, as well as the testimonial statements and handset interviews is imperative to the narrative of the gallery, demonstrating how people of faith practice ritual as a component of daily living and as a response to their spirituality. These first person accounts personalize religious belief, therefore disintegrating the barrier of unfamiliarity that spurs religious intolerance. Visitors reading these testimonials or viewing these photographs can associate these practices to active tradition and a specific group of believers. Objects can be examined, therefore, not as static material items, but as tools used to facilitate worship or spiritual practice. This context infuses these objects with an active connection to daily life.

Under each of the photographs bridging display cases are handsets playing clips of people discussing their own ritual practices. These are the same people whose testimonial statements appear in print throughout the gallery's display cases. Each handset explores one of the many themes of the lifecycle and combines the statements of belief of many different faiths. This comparative technique advances the narrative of the gallery by demonstrating how ritual is practiced by multiple faiths. It allows individual voice to be combined in this collective theme demonstrating that while the ritual differs, the roots of belief motivating these rituals is shared by many. The inclusion of handset testimonials connects objects with oral storytelling. One important aspect of all faiths is the need to tell others about faith—

linking the handsets with evangelism, or to the practice of passing down stories of origin from one generation to the next.

This aspect is further reinforced through a short video presentation "Ways to Worship" which records believers of each of the six major world religions participating in religious worship. Through this video, visitors are able to compare worshiping styles and are able to watch believers participate in ritual which might be unfamiliar to them. Furthermore, by viewing visual images of ceremonial practice, visitors can connect the act of worship to the objects found in the display cases of each of the six major world religions.

The Glasgow Forum of Faith Declaration (Appendix 2) provides valuable support to the gallery's narrative and the museum's institutional goals. This framed document describes the commitment of civic authorities and religious leaders to "work together for mutual understanding and the good of the City of Glasgow"[81] and reinforces the mission of the museum to foster greater understanding and respect for other religions and faiths. This significant document is loaned permanently to the museum. Displayed publicly, the people of Glasgow are reminded of the efforts taken by religious and political leaders to work together for the well-being of Glasgow. This declaration is the final object on display in the Gallery of Religious Life, hanging beside the gallery's exit. In this position, it echoes the intentions of this gallery, which is to challenge visitors to see how religions share common goals, values, and beliefs. The location of this civic document in the Gallery of Religious

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[81] From the Forum of Faith Declaration created in 2002 and signed by the Glasgow leaders of the Bahá'i, Church of Scotland, Buddhist faith, Roman Catholic Church, the Scottish Episcopal Church, the Jewish faith, the Sikh faith, the Hindu faith, the Muslim faith, the Strathclyde Police (Glasgow's local police), and the Lord Provost.

Life legitimizes the efforts taken by the museum to challenge visitors to "work together for mutual understanding" and to develop respect for those practicing a religion different from theirs. By hanging this Declaration, which states the commitment of the city, police, and religious leaders of Glasgow to work towards greater religious tolerance, the museum has demonstrated to its visitors that its own goals are shared by a larger community. Furthermore, by linking the Forum of Faith to the Gallery of Religious Life, a sense of authenticity is achieved for the displays. Visitors who question the commitment religious groups have made to the development of the display cases see that these religious groups are in agreement with the Declaration. As both the Declaration and the gallery share common goals, it is easy to confuse the religious leaders' participation in the Forum of Faith with their endorsement of the gallery space.

The physical space of the gallery shapes and advances the narrative of the gallery. Antithetical to the Gallery of Religious Art's high ceilings and bright interior, the Gallery of Religious Life is housed in a dark, cave-like space. The room is crowded with rows of display cases that dramatically contrast with the simplicity and sparseness of the Gallery of Religious Art. Brian Edwards discusses the architectural differences between the Gallery of Religious Art and the Gallery of Religious Life suggesting "... whereas the former is open with views to Cathedral Square, the latter is windowless and tomb-like."[82] The dark space of the Gallery of Religious Life creates a womb-like intimacy through the black tightness of the room as the visitors examine objects representing daily life. The narrow aisle between the

[82] Brian Edwards "Separating internal imagery from external form," *The Architects Journal* (30 June 1993), 24.

life cycle cases and the six world religions prevents visitors from taking a distanced or holistic look at the objects. Instead, the tightness of the space pushes visitors towards the objects. The blackness of the gallery space causes visitors to be reflected in the displays and it is impossible to look around the gallery without bumping into another person (figures 28 and 29). The forced interaction visitors have with the objects, with the closeness of the objects and the reflection of visitors in the display cases, demonstrate the curatorial team's desire to challenge visitors to understand how believers value religion. Finally, it speaks to the stages of human life: the tightness of the room reflects the womb-like environment associated with birth, while the darkness of the space speaks to the final stage of the life cycle and its tomb-like association. Thus, the gallery environment echoes the themes explored within its walls.

Chris Arthur, lecturer in Theology and Religious Studies at St. David's University College and critic of St Mungo Museum, challenges the spiritual integrity of the museum. He asks:

> Can museums of religion point their visitors beyond the objects they display, beyond the words of their captions, towards this essential intangible element of religion, or are they irrevocably anchored by their exhibits to a level which is of only secondary importance to the faiths concerned?[83]

Arthur's question is important as it challenges the ability of objects to communicate the intangible nature of religion. The Gallery of Religious Life focuses attention on ritual objects that are thematically organized in order to draw visitors into contemplation of religion's influence on daily life. In this way, Mark O'Neill

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[83] Chris Arthur, "Exhibiting the Sacred," *Godly Things: Museums, Objects, and Religion*, Crispin Paine, ed. (London and New York: Leicester University Press, 2000), 6.

suggests that the Gallery of Religious Life holds the potential to explore the "meaning of life itself." Julian Spalding, the acting Director of Glasgow Museums during the conception of St Mungo Museum, reiterates this idea, arguing that museum displays capture and bring out the intangible meanings of objects. He describes:

> An Egyptian papyrus boat, and Aztec golden raft, and a Viking ship were all used to convey the dead into the next world. Imaginatively displayed, objects like these, though so far removed from our own lives, could evoke profound feelings in the visitor so as to prevent any trivialization of the subjects, such as the superficial reactions inspired by cadavers or mummies. [84]

Spalding's comments speak to the belief held by the museum's staff that objects are physical manifestations of the intangible nature of religion. Staff further argue that through the collective display of material objects representing ritual practice and through the inclusion of testimonials and photographs, the religious meaning of objects is made visible to viewers. Yet although objects are contextualized in these thematic displays, the text labels provide visitors with very limited information. While the other media accompanying the object are useful for animating the object and reinforcing its association to ritual, it is more difficult to see how these objects evoke profound feelings in visitors. In many ways, the display cases at St Mungo Museum are nothing more than modernized cabinets of curiosity. Curators have amassed as many specimens relating to religion as they could, and have given them the appropriate name label. Yet, unlike cabinets of curiosity, curators have provided their own context in which to view objects. The themes of the display cases and the inclusion of testimonials situate the object within the framework of religious ritual. Spalding justifies this display approach:

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[84] Julian Spalding, *The Poetic Museum: Reviving Historic Collections*, (Munich; New York: Prestel, 2002), 151.

> It is perfectly possible for a museum to communicate genuine religious belief, and avoid the pitfalls of conflicting doctrines by allowing faiths to be expressed through the works of art that were created for them and the personal testimonies of believers, where these are still practiced, or by personal historic accounts where not – this methodology was used to great effect in the St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art in Glasgow.[85]

The large black and white photographs found among the display cases, too, play an integral role in communicating meaning. These images demonstrate people participating in ritual, therefore, creating evidence for the curatorial claim that religious ritual is actively integrated into life. The photographs locate ritual objects within religious belief.

Representing Controversy:

The inclusion of photographs and handsets allowed curators the opportunity to address the negative connotations associated with ritual and religious practice. While the majority of the gallery focuses upon explaining ritual in a positive light, the curatorial team also hoped to draw attention to some of the negative aspects of religious practice. Through this action, St Mungo Museum has responded to what David Carr refers to as the 'museum's public task.' Carr writes: "the museum's public tasks cannot be less than to address knowledge fairly and completely, and in doing so to nourish differences of perception and response. This should involve controversy, alternative interpretations, and emerging points of view."[86] Controversy is addressed subtly throughout the thematic cases, but most directly in the display case on War and Peace, exploring the consequences of holy war, where the Holocaust

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[85] Ibid., 151.
[86] David Carr, *The Promise of Cultural Institutions,* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2003, 110.

and the Crusades are both examined as part of this theme. The inclusion of photographs depicting the aftermath of Bloody Sunday, too, challenges visitors to consider religious violence. Most strongly, however, the curatorial decision to include a large photograph of a young Egyptian girl undergoing a clitoridectomy has evoked a strong reaction from visitors, who are challenged to think about the purpose of this religious ritual rather than being asked to condone or support this practice. This latter inclusion sparked the museum's first protest by a group of feminists arguing that "the caption did not clearly condemn the practice."[87] One Jewish man responded to this photograph on the gallery's talkback board by writing that he felt it wrong to compare "clitoris removal with Bar Mitzvah,"[88] referencing the photograph's location adjacent to the Coming of Age display case. By keeping this photograph in the gallery, however, St Mungo Museum has attempted to "address knowledge fairly" by presenting information, especially religious information, as free from political or social biases as possible. The inclusion of this photograph ensures that visitors know that this ritual custom is actively practiced in the world. Finally, by including testimonials in the display cases and on the handsets, the curatorial team has addressed Carr's demand that museums present differing opinions and responses. For example, curators interviewed Muslim women about arranged marriages and have included these responses on the handsets. Through this action, visitors hear the voices of Muslim women.

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[87] Lovelace, 73.

[88] From the 2004 talkback board comment database. The talkback boards, small bulletin boards where visitors are invited to post their comments, are intended to function as an outlet for visitors responses to aspects of the display. One is found in the Gallery of Religious Life and another in the Scottish Life Gallery.

Conclusion: Examining the Larger Narrative:

St Mungo Museum attempts to create links among people, demonstrating that religion has an impact on both the production of art and everyday living. Through the development of these premises, and through the exhibition and display of religious objects, the museum hopes to decrease the religious tension in Glasgow, in Scotland, and throughout the world. The Gallery of Religious Art and the Gallery of Religious Life are instrumental to the development of this cause. Their importance to the larger narrative is indicated by their dominance in the museum's title: St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art. The Gallery of Religious Art and the Gallery of Religious Life work in tandem to create this narrative. While the Gallery of Religious Art privileges the religious object as art, the Gallery of Religious Life uses similar objects to speak to daily ritual practice. The display used in each of the galleries reinforces both narratives.

It is impossible, for example, to walk into the Gallery of Religious Life without first seeing the Gallery of Religious Art; furthermore, it is not viable to exit the Gallery of Religious Life without again viewing the Gallery of Religious Art. The curatorial team could have chosen to use the side gallery for the Scottish Gallery, the temporary exhibition space, or the education space; yet, they selected this small room to serve as the Gallery of Religious Life. The juxtaposing nature of these two galleries creates a tension that reinforces the individual narratives of each gallery space. After visiting the Gallery of Religious Art, the tiny, black, cave-like space of the Gallery of Religious Life emphasizes the display cases packed with ritual objects. These cases stand in stark contrast to the presentation of objects in the Gallery of

Religious Art. In the art gallery, religious objects are presented as autonomous, are given their own space to be viewed, are heavily spotlighted, and are accompanied by a lengthy text panel. In contrast, the lack of space given to each object in the Gallery of Religious Life draws attention to the larger theme of the display case. The restricted text labeling forces visitors to think about the life cycle or world religion theme found within the case. In contrast to the largeness of the Gallery of Religious Art, the smallness of the Gallery of Religious Life reinforces the presence of the visitor. The compact nature of the Gallery of Religious Life forces visitors to stand close to the display cases, causing their own reflection to appear in the glass. Furthermore, visitors become aware of each other as they move around other visitors to peer into the cases, or as they step back to see the case more holistically and find another visitor in their way. This inclusion of visitors emphasizes the significance of human life to the narrative of the Gallery of Religious Life. The inclusion of first person testimonial, and photographs of believers engaged in ritual further the connection to daily spiritual belief. These elements are not included in the Gallery of Religious Art because objects are used to speak to art and not life.

While it is easy to see how the juxtaposition of these two gallery spaces reinforces the individual narratives of the galleries, it is easy to overlook the advancement of the larger narrative, which is made possible by pairing these two gallery themes. The location and differing themes of these two galleries suggests a tension between religious objects representing art and religious objects reflecting ritual. There is a dichotomy at play, therefore, between religious art and religious life. Religious objects are placed in the Gallery of Religious Art to speak of art, and

placed in the Gallery of Religious Life to speak to daily living. While it appears that these objects are fixed in these meanings, the duplication of some religious objects challenges this either/or categorization. Religious objects, such as the Buddha Shakyamuni are present in both spaces. The location of the Buddha in the Gallery of Religious Art inscribes this statue with artistic merit, while its placement in the Gallery of Religious Life links it with daily living. By using multiple Buddha Shakyamuni statues in these two galleries, the curators have demonstrated to visitors that religious objects can be both viewed as art and as material evidence of ritual practice—these objects are both aesthetically pleasing and reflective of religious life. This display tactic challenges visitors to extend their understanding of the boundaries of meanings imposed on the objects by their location of exhibition. Visitors are challenged to think beyond these set categories to view the museum's objects as reflective of multiple meanings—they speak to aesthetic meaning, religious meaning, spiritual practice, and religious belief outside the visitor's own perspective. This is done in an effort to extend visitors' thinking, thereby challenging them to view people of differing faith practices with greater understanding and respect.

Chapter 2 Figure List

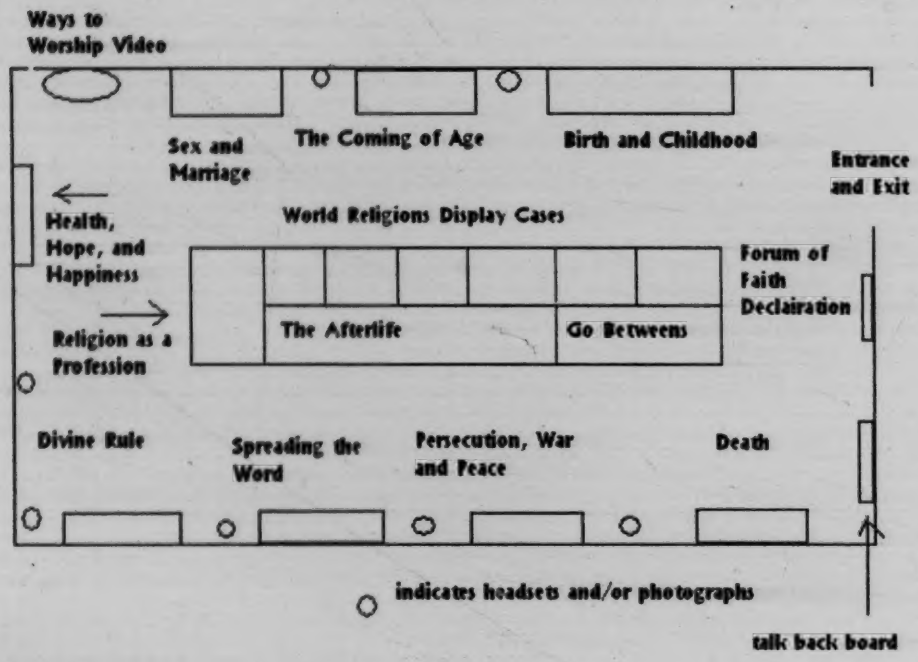

Figure 21
Gallery of Religious Life Floor Plan
Rough Sketch by Alison Campbell, October 2006.
Drawing not to scale.

Figure 22
Buddhism Discovery Box
Scottish Gallery, St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art

Figure 23
Birth Display Case
Gallery of Religious Life, St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art

Figure 24
Sex and Marriage Display Case
Gallery of Religious Life, St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art

Figure 25
View of the Buddhism and Christianity Display Case
Gallery of Religious Life, St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art

Figure 26
Partial view of Buddhism Display, with Birth Display reflected in the glass
Buddha Shakyamuni statue is located to the left of the Christening Gown, and directly below the Reclining Buddha.
Gallery of Religious Life, St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art

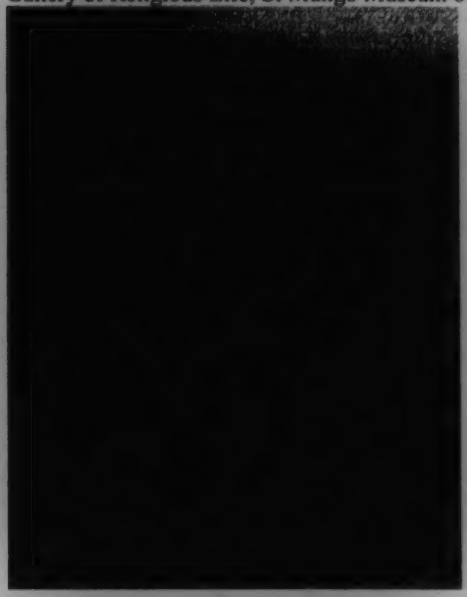

Figure 27
Buddha Shakyamuni
Gallery of Religious Art, St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art

Note the reflection of the visitors in the glass.
Note the Christening Gown from the Birth Display Case reflected in the Buddhism case.

Figure 28
The Buddhism and Christianity Display Cases
Gallery of Religious Life, St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art

Figure 29
View of the life cycle displays and visitors looking at the cases on the six major world religions
Gallery of Religious Life, St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art

Note: All photographs were taken by the author in May 2005.

Chapter 3: Using Community to Achieve St Mungo Museum's Institutional Goals

In Chapter 2, I argue that the non-tangible components of the gallery, such as the testimonials, handsets, as well as the photographs animate the objects in a way that facilitates the audience's connection of these objects to ritual practice. In Chapter 3, I extend this argument by examining the role that community plays in the achievement of the museum's mandate. I argue that while many museums are currently finding new ways to integrate community into their programming, the fulfillment of St Mungo museum's mandate necessitates active community support. Because religion is examined in St Mungo Museum in terms of active belief, an idea hinging on the non-tangible nature of faith, believers are an important and necessary component of the Museum's display. Thus, Glasgow's religious communities were invited to participate in the museum's initial planning and to provide testimonial statements in the permanent galleries, and are now encouraged to organize temporary exhibitions and assist with public programming. Through these actions, religious communities are used to endorse the activities of the museum. Furthermore, I will argue that community participation is also necessary to the attainment of the institutional mandate. In this regard, the defined community extends beyond religious communities, and refers, instead, to Glaswegians of all religious and ethnic backgrounds.

With the increasing pluralism of today's societies, museums are adapting to reflect their new publics. As transmitters of cultural knowledge, museums are

recognizing the need to rethink their relationship with current and potential audiences. Museums are changing in an attempt to end their reputation as elitist institutions by instead presenting themselves as being community-minded. As Eileen Hooper-Greenhill writes:

> ...new ways are being developed to move museums and their objects into communities, links are being made between historic cultural objects and the living members of that culture, and at last, the needs of audience are being researched and responded to.[89]

Today, as museums are increasingly linked with leisure, and are in competition with the entertainment industry, they are challenged to rethink their position within society and to question their purposes. Education and the museum's relationship with the public have risen as top priorities of the museum. The museum has shifted from being object-directed to being people-directed. Kenneth Hudson reflects upon this trend:

> . . . the most fundamental change that has affected museums during the [past] half century . . . is the now almost universal conviction that they exist in order to serve the public. The old-style museum felt itself under no such obligation. It existed, it had a building, it had collections and a staff to look after them. It was reasonably adequately financed, and its visitors, usually not numerous, came to look, to wonder and to admire what was set before them. They were in no sense partners in the enterprise. The museum's prime responsibility was to its collections, not its visitors.[90]

Through this self-awareness, museums are moving away from being receptacles of knowledge, where the institution is the primary voice, to museums that represent and attend to the needs of people. While museums are maintaining their object focus, they are increasingly incorporating public voice into their exhibitions. Thus, museum

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[89] Eileen Hooper-Greenhill, "Museums, Exhibitions, and Communities: Cultural Publics," *Semiotica* 108, no. 1-2 (1996): 179.
[90] Ibid., 232.

exhibitions are redeveloping, and programming is made increasingly inclusive of the variety of people composing the museum's public. In this way, a diverse public is able to claim ownership for their museums.

This step is ever more necessary as museums seek to justify public funding. As institutions of the state, many museums are accountable to citizens, whose tax dollars fund museum projects. The museum's public is not homogeneous, but is composed of people of varying ethnicities, incomes, genders, and educational backgrounds. This diverse public needs to be represented in the museum. As Edmund Barry Gaither argues:

> Museums have obligations as both educational and social institutions to participate in and contribute toward the restoration of wholeness in the communities of our country. They ought to increase understanding within and between cultural groups in the matrix of lives in which we exist. They ought to help give substance, correction, and reality to the often incomplete and distorted stories we hear about art and social history. They should not dodge the controversy that often arises from the reappraisal of our common and overlapping pasts. If our museums cannot muster the courage to tackle these considerations in ways appropriate to their various missions and scales, then concern must be raised for how they justify the receipt of support from the public.[91]

Today's museum must be accountable to the people that it represents. Many museums are shifting their practice away from an elitist perspective by instead positioning themselves in dialogue with their publics. Opening at the height of this debate, St Mungo Museum reflects this modern museum thinking. Julian Spalding, Director of Glasgow Museums responsible for the St Mungo Museum project, argued for the inclusion of the working classes and immigrant communities in Glasgow's

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[91] Edmund Barry Gaither, "'Hey! That's Mine': Thoughts on Pluralism and American Museums," *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), 58.

museums. He asserted "if one really wants to change the museum's public and extend the reach of the museums into society, one has to change the power structure within the museum itself."[92] Arguably, the museum's mandate necessitates this reevaluation of the power structure because Glaswegians are not going to change their mind-sets in response to the institutional message of a top-heavy, bureaucratic museum. Rather, it is the involvement of many groups of people in the museum that will restore wholeness in Glasgow. Since St Mungo Museum focuses on religion, a topic centered on the spiritual beliefs of people, the curatorial voice needs to be accompanied by the voices of faith practitioners. It is impossible for St Mungo Museum's mandate to be achieved while the voice of the museum is entirely curatorial: to achieve mutual understanding and respect of people of faith and those of none, people need to be involved with the museum's planning and actively engaging with its programming. Achieving religious tolerance is more accomplishable if the museum's communities can see the endorsement of religious believers in this project.

In his analysis of nationalism, Benedict Anderson asserts: "...all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined."[93] From its foundation in 1991, to its opening in 1993, to the present day, community has been at the heart of St Mungo Museum, and is central to the museum's programming. Curatorial statements

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[92] Julian Spalding, "Vision in Action," *Art Museums and the Price of Success. An international comparison: the United States, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, with a contribution giving the German perspective,* Truss Gubbels and Annemoon van Hemel, eds. (Amsterdam: Boeckman Foundation, 1993), 94.

[93] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1991), 6.

confuse who the imagined communities are. I argue that close links between ethnicity and religion complicates the clarity with which curators speak of religious groups as their community, since the involvement of religious groups in the museum strongly suggests their qualification as one of St Mungo Museum's communities. Religious communities are invited to participate both in the museum's short-term activities, such as the temporary exhibition space and public programming, while they also figure prominently in the Gallery of Religious Life and the Scottish Gallery, two of the museum's permanent galleries. Community participation in these two facets of the museum works in very different ways to achieve St Mungo Museum's mandate. In the first instance, the contribution of these communities generates knowledge and understanding of religious belief, while in the second example community is used to authenticate the narrative of the permanent galleries. In both cases, the involvement of community endorses the activities of the museum.

Community Voice and the Temporary Exhibition Space:

The temporary exhibition space serves an important role in its inclusion of community, and provides a venue where religious groups are able to actively represent their own faith beliefs through curatorial opportunities. Arguably, the achievement of the museum's mandate is based upon community groups taking this ownership, a step that is only possible when groups feel included in the museum. David Carr, author of *The Promise of Cultural Institutions* asserts:

> A community will be engaged by its cultures only if it is a community where memory resides, where the possibilities and satisfactions of learning are

> present and valued, and where the future is held not only in its families, churches, and schools, but also in its understanding of the past....[94]

The museum is an institution that facilitates this exploration of past, present, and future, and at St Mungo Museum, the temporary exhibition space is one discursive space that allows this exploration by local community members, who by organizing exhibitions, seek to understand themselves, and reach out and teach others about themselves. The transitory nature of this space encourages discussion of issues and ideas not possible in the permanent gallery spaces—spaces that have not been updated since the museum opened in 1993. Community members are given the opportunity to tell their own stories, express their own ideas, promote their own beliefs, and engage the museum's public in conversation about their faith group. As Curator of World Religions, Alison Kelly describes:

> Since the visitor's experience to a museum is often determined by the potential to be able to 'see themselves' and their story in the museum, the temporary exhibition space and events and activities are opportunities for faiths not represented within the permanent displays to have a voice in the museum.[95]

At St Mungo Museum, all religious communities are encouraged to use the temporary exhibition space to claim ownership for this institution and its projects, and for their own religious beliefs.

The Bahá'i are one group that has responded to the museum's invitation to develop a temporary exhibition at St Mungo Museum. To compensate for their under-representation in the permanent galleries, the Bahá'i Council for Scotland

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[94] David Carr, *The Promise of Cultural Institutions* (New York; Walnut Creek; Lanham; Oxford: Altamira Press, 2003), 58.
[95] Alison Kelly, "St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art, Glasgow," *Material Religion* 1 no. 3 (November 2005): 436.

worked in partnership with St Mungo Museum to develop the exhibition *One People: The Bahá'is—A Worldwide Community.* This exhibition, which was at St Mungo Museum from 1 June to 21 October 2001, included artworks from Bahá'i artists and a series of information panels outlining the teachings of the Bahá'i faith. These panels focused on Bahá'is as individuals, families and communities, as well as Bahá'is in Scotland, the UK, Europe and the rest of the world.[96] The approach taken by the Bahá'i echoes the community-directed nature of the museum, where exhibitions focus locally, then nationally, and then finally internationally. *One People* is an educational exhibition, teaching Glaswegians and people worldwide about the Bahá'i faith, using objects like a model of the New Delhi House of Worship to explain to visitors the nature of their worship, or a letter from Abdu'l-Bah'a Abbas, leader of the Bahá'i faith from 1892-1921, and son of the faith's founding prophet, to teach about the Bahá'i faith's history. This exhibition invited audience interaction, converting a room in the museum into a 'Tranquility Zone,' a space where visitors engaged in prayer and meditation. The Bahá'i Council for Scotland also set up a 'One World Tree' inviting visitors to hang their hopes for humanity upon it. Through these activities, visitors were exposed to the tangible nature of the Bahá'i faith. It also situated the Bahá'i faith within the Glasgow religious scene. This exhibition allowed Scottish Bahá'is to actively claim ownership for the practice of their faith in Scotland, uniting the Scottish Bahá'i chapter with their larger world community. This exhibition countered the difficulties the museum had in representing the Bahá'i in the permanent galleries, since the Bahá'i, unlike most religions, do not use ritual objects

[96] "Faith on Show," UK Bahá'i Review. <www.bahai.org.uk/uk_review/prev_iss/2/p11.html.> (March 2006).

in the practice of their faith. Furthermore, this exhibition made visible the contribution that Bahá'is have long made to inter-faith relations in the city of Glasgow.[97]

Whereas the Bahá'i used the temporary exhibition space to speak directly about their beliefs, this space also facilitates increased exploration of the greater religious scene in Glasgow. The photography supplied by Jim Dunn, Glasgow Museums' photographer, continues the themes of the Gallery of Religious Life by capturing Glaswegians actively engaged in ritual. Dunn has established relationships with members of Glasgow's religious communities, and has solicited permission to photograph religious adherents as they participate in faith-based activities. Dunn's work, which began in 2002, materialized in a 2003 exhibition on ways of worship, *Faithfully Yours,* and has also developed into a 2005 exhibition examining religious festivals, *Just Another Day.*[98] Through Dunn's photographs, intimate ritual moments are captured on film, allowing the museum's public to witness Glaswegians as they participate in ritual. This show increases the public's understanding of specific religious practices in the same way that testimonials, photographs, and the Ways to Worship video operate in the Gallery of Religious Life, demonstrating the active participation of Glaswegians in ritual practice. This photographic work is also significant in its focus on a larger community. While religious practitioners engaged in ritual is the premise of these photographs, the comparative work achieved by Dunn

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[97] see http//www.bahaijournal.org.uk/BJ200107/bcti.htm

[98] Kelly, 437. Also from my interview with Kelly, 23 May 2005. See also *Friends Preview: The Magazine of Glasgow Museums*, April, May, June, 2005, 12. From: <http://www.glasgowmuseums.com/assets/fileStore/Preview%20April%20to%20June%202005.pdf> (6 March 2006).

takes a more holistic look at belief in Glasgow. Dunn thus extends the borders of the show from being about a single faith, to the examination of a wider population of people. By extending the focus of his work, he has created new parameters to discuss religion in Glasgow. This broadening of Dunn's examination is important to the fulfillment of the museum's mandate, situating local faith believers within a diversity of faiths and beliefs. By showing these believers engaged in a variety of faith practices, Dunn has demonstrated how Glasgow is a city of many faiths. Dunn's show also becomes a visual record of St Mungo Museum's communities by showcasing the city's many faith groups.

The museum's public programming allows Glaswegians opportunities to discuss religion in a way similar to Dunn's photographic work. A Faith to Faith Series invites scholars, religious leaders, and interfaith organizations to speak on issues of religion or faith relating to the current temporary show, while school programming challenges students to think of their own faith in relationship to the larger community. A Meet Your Neighbour Weekend, held annually at the museum, invites religious groups to set up conference tables or run activities as a means to promote their beliefs. At this event, Glaswegians are exposed to the religious practices of other faith groups through participation in unfamiliar activities. These include involvement in meditation as directed by various faith groups, or drumming workshops. Visitors also can listen to lectures given by spokespeople for interfaith cooperation, enjoy musical performances by faith groups, or take museum tours with

curatorial staff. These initiatives are designed to promote "creative dialogue," as people gather together to learn about their neighbours' faiths.[99]

Constance Perin describes the necessity for audience involvement in the museum in her article "The Communicative Circle." In this essay, Perin argues for the exchange of information between the institution and the audience. She asserts, "[t]he central issue for the communicative circle is audiences' conceptual receptivities to exhibitions, no matter whether audiences assimilate or contest exhibitions' contents."[100] At St Mungo Museum, this exchange of information takes place through its community-led exhibitions and through the public's response to lectures given by the Faith to Faith Series. In these cases, the public is given opportunity to voice their own concerns and to be spokespeople for their own beliefs. At the Faith to Faith lectures, members of the public are asked to speak about their own reactions to the themes addressed in the temporary exhibition space, and through dialogue between the presenter and audience, the participants extend their knowledge and understanding of the topic. The achievement of the mandate is measured upon these exchanges of information.

The temporary exhibition space allows for one last conversation between the community, the museum, and the visitor. It becomes a space where curatorial staff can explore issues not discussed in the permanent gallery space, becoming an environment where a more contemporary exploration of religion takes place. Kelly

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[99] From the "Meet Your Neighbour" promotional brochure, May 2005. See Appendix for a copy of this flyer.

[100] Constance Perin, "The Communicative Circle," *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture*, ed. Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kreamer, and Steven D. Lavine (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), 190.

suggests that the exhibition space "is a chance for important concepts, topical issues and diversity within particular religious tradition to be explored in greater detail."[101] The space acts in response to contemporary issues, and examines and probes into current implications of faith. Kelly argues that the space counters the rigidity of the other gallery spaces, allowing dialogue that is lost in these spaces. This space becomes a place of discussion and exchange when community groups host exhibitions which are responded to by staff-curated projects or museum programming. Through these processes memory is preserved while a collective history for Glaswegians is created. These initiatives challenge Glaswegians to broaden their understanding of religious diversity.

Using Community to Authenticate the Permanent Galleries

While the temporary exhibition space and public programming facilitate dialogue and exchange with the community, allowing community members to be both the communicators and the communicated, the permanent galleries use community participation to authenticate the narrative of the Gallery of Religious Life and the Scottish Gallery, increasing the believability of these exhibitions. As the curatorial team prepared to develop the museum's exhibitions, they quickly realized that the museum would not reach its institutional goals if displays were organized entirely around objects. Religion is grounded in the 'spiritual' and adherents build their belief upon faith, an intangible, non-visual element. Mark O'Neill, senior curator of Glasgow Museums during its founding years, argues that "[i]n the case of religion

[101] Kelly, 437.

'meaning' has an emotional and spiritual dimension that can be described much more powerfully by those who experience it than those who have simply studied it."[102] O'Neill's comments recognize the curatorial decision to not speak on behalf of religious groups; it was felt that communities needed to explain their own stories, to elucidate their religious customs, and to share their beliefs. In this way, participants act as a bridge between the institution and Glaswegians. Their presence in the museum ensures visitors that faith adherents endorse the religious beliefs presented in the museum and allows people of faith to share their own perception of religious truth. With this involvement, community members add authenticity to the exhibitions designed by curators, and therefore help advance the narratives of the galleries.

Establishing the need of the museum to include religious practitioners in the museum program, staff struggled to envision what community participation entailed. To ensure proper representation of religion, Mark O'Neill suggested, "some sort of consultation or collaboration with believers was therefore required."[103] Staff met with many of the religious leaders in Glasgow, discussing objects, faith beliefs, and negotiating display cases. Curators were open to the suggestions given by religious leaders, welcoming the partnership of churches and faith organizations. For example, the Education Officer at the Central Mosque provided the idea to develop cases on the six major world religions.[104] Furthermore, the respective communities donated many items then used in these cases. However, staff realized that an advisory panel was not

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[102] Mark O'Neill, "Serious Earth," *Museum Journal* (February 1994): 28.
[103] Ibid., 28.
[104] Antonia Lovelace, from Antonia Lovelace, Elizabeth Carnegie, and Harry Dunlop, "St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art—A New Development in Glasgow," *Journal of Museum Ethnography* no. 7 (1995):67.

the solution—unto itself—as it is impossible to represent the diversity of belief within a small committee. Sects and faith divisions make it difficult to choose a religious representative who encompasses the beliefs of an entire faith community.[105]

As Steven D. Lavine argues, when only one representative of a community group is involved in discussion, the exhibition narrative is as problematic as the narrative provided by the curator alone. Lavine suggests that "a solution is likely to be found only in an adequate process of dialogue, one that can transform the voice of authority on which museums have traditionally relied into the voice of a pluralistic society."[106] Curators concluded that the exhibitions needed the inclusion of the faith practitioner's actual and figurative voices:

> Oral history was seen as providing some sort of human soul for the museum, testimony which would bring the object to life and give some sense of their meaning and the feeling they evoke on a personal level.[107]

Ritual meaning, therefore, is supplied not by text paneling in the galleries, but through the testimonials of Glaswegians involved in faith. The testimonials animate objects by associating them with people and actual religious practice.

The curatorial team devised a system of interviews with faith practitioners to satisfy the perceived need for personal involvement in the museum. Elizabeth

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[105] Although the museum carefully consulted with members of the Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, and Jewish communities, they were negligent with the Christian community. This was for two reasons: first, staff felt familiar with this topic, and secondly, the plethora of Christian denominations made it very difficult to select consultants. After the museum opened, criticism of the museum came from the Church of Scotland which felt underrepresented in the Scottish Gallery. See O'Neill, "Serious Earth," 28 and Carnegie, 75.

[106] Steven D. Lavine, "Audience, Ownership, and Authenticity," *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture*, ed. Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kreamer, and Steven D. Lavine (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), 145.

[107] Elizabeth Carnegie, from Antonia Lovelace, Elizabeth Carnegie, and Harry Dunlop, "St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art—A New Development in Glasgow," *Journal of Museum Ethnography* no. 7 (1995):74.

Carnegie, the Curator of Social History during the development of the museum, suggests, "the process of community consultation was intended to provide the personal and local touch necessary to effectively people the displays."[108] Curators interviewed Glaswegians belonging to local faith groups, using the information in the introductory video, testimonials, and handset narratives. Through this process, staff hoped that the interviews would reveal the diversity of beliefs held by practitioners within the same faith group. Participants were asked questions based upon the themes developed in St Mungo Museum's display cases. The museum was hesitant in using religious leaders for these interviews because religious leaders are trained in explaining faith through doctrine. Rather, curators preferred to hear from adherents to these religious communities in a desire to capture participants' true feelings about religion, thus bringing a personal element to the exhibitions.

Museum staff used contacts made in an earlier Glasgow Museums exhibition *Community Connections*, curated by Antonia Lovelace in 1987 as a starting point, and then used these participants to meet other practitioners.[109] From these recorded interviews, clips were selected to be inserted into handsets, audiotapes mounted to the walls in both the Scottish Gallery and the Gallery of Religious Life. Each handset plays clips from interviewees representing different faiths. The handsets are organized around themes, each handset exploring another aspect of religion. The museum visitor is thus able to pick up a handset and listen to Glaswegians describing how their beliefs address such topics as birth and raising children while standing

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[108] Ibid., 74.
[109] Ibid., 74.

beside the Birth and Childhood display case in full sight of video games and baptismal cards, or arranged marriages while adjacent to the sari (see Appendix 3).

Written quotes from these interviews are also integrated into the display cases in the Scottish Gallery and the Gallery of Religious Life and have become the "personal and local touch" described by Carnegie. Placed next to relevant objects, these quotes provide multiple viewpoints on religious issues, allowing for "contradictory opinions to be expressed, freeing up the curatorial voice, and by giving people freedom to talk about their faith, enables them to challenge any perceived beliefs."[110] Arranged marriage is one topic explored in this manner. Muslim women were able to express their feelings about this custom, often correcting western stereotypes. Through this procedure, members of Glasgow's religious communities are able to share their own feelings and beliefs about their faith. These quotes are placed in the display cases with a photograph of the believer, thereby, demonstrating active belief, and providing alternative perspectives to understand religion. They begin the processes of moving the discussion of religion away from a third-person textbook report, towards a first-person narrative, shifting the exhibition away from being completely object-directed.

This opportunity for religious practitioners to speak of their own belief, and "be ambassadors for their faith"[111] is most dramatically seen in the museum's introductory video. This ten-minute presentation expresses the museum's purpose and goals, and describes the main gallery spaces. Interspersed among these key messages are spotlight interviews with Glaswegians speaking about their religious

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[110] Ibid., 75.
[111] Ibid., 75.

beliefs. Through this informal interview process, the main tenets of each of the six major world religions are quickly presented to the viewer providing a context through which to view the exhibitions, and reminding visitors of the diversity of religious practices found in the city.

The handsets, display quotes, and the introductory video add authenticity to the museum, and provide Glaswegians a voice in their museum. By accompanying the display quotes with photographs of the believer, visitors both read the testimonials and visualize the speaker. These statements are the opinions and values of real, everyday people. By participating in the museum project individual believers and faith groups claim ownership of this museum, demonstrating that their need to express themselves is as great as the museum's need for community members to share their stories.

David Goa argues that as society becomes increasingly diverse, traditionally marginalized groups actively seek inclusion in museums. Goa asserts that these citizens "…want to be known. They want to be presented in the museum because this is their home and the museum is the public manifestation of the society in which they live."[112] Through involvement in the museum, immigrants and new citizens claim ownership of the country they now inhabit. The relationship becomes symbiotic: the museum needs community to authenticate their actions, while the community needs the museum to tell its stories. John Kuo Wei Tchen, co-founder of the Chinatown History Project in New York, suggests "the authorship of an exhibition, and therefore

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[112] David J. Goa, *Working in the Fields of Meaning: Cultural Communities, Museums and the New Pluralism*, for upcoming publication this month on the Ronning Centre Website: <http://www.augustana.ca/centres/ronningcentre/>, given to me by the author, p.8.

the authority associated with authorship, should be viewed as a shared and collaborative process and not as an either/or proposition."[113] In St Mungo Museum, collaboration with community members is encouraged, and community members have responded eagerly to the museum's invitation to participate, seeing it as a platform to present their religious beliefs and justify the place of their religion in Glasgow.

Although community authentication is considered vital to the museum, the institutional voice often overrides the community voice in the permanent galleries. As Carnegie pointed out, St Mungo Museum is still very much "curated."[114] Although testimonials are included as a part of these permanent displays, curators, who have chosen short segments of the interviews to place along-side related objects, direct the use of these statements, using them to authenticate the curators' actions and to give the exhibition a perspective outside of the curator's viewpoint. However intentionally or unintentionally, the use of the testimonials is manipulated by curatorial direction. The testimonial is used to provide authenticity to the display, and yet, the meaning that the testimonial gives does not always correlate with the intended message of the faith adherent. This scenario highlights the complexity involved in using testimonials in museum displays. The curator does not intend to manipulate the participant's testimonial, but the curatorial voice overrides the voice of the faith adherent. For example, Christian Cwti Green makes the following

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[113] John Kuo Wei Tchen, "Creating a Dialogic Museum," *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture*, Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kreamer, and Steven D. Lavine, eds (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), 297.
[114] Carnegie, 77.

statement, which is posted in the Birth and Childhood display case in the Gallery of Religious Life:

> Men are trying to compensate because they can't produce themselves and it is a kind of God-like function. From God creating the earth to women giving birth it is a God-like thing and men can't do it.

What is the intended message Green makes? What is she telling visitors about her Christian beliefs or her view of faith? Is she promoting a positive view of women, or is she simply answering a question? Because the parameters of these interviews are not elucidated to visitors, visitors read these statements as they appear. Yet, this part of the interview was possibly chosen by curatorial staff to promote "religious tolerance and tolerance of the religious views of both men and women."[115] The curatorial staff, for example, actively promoted the inclusion of female Muslim voice, infusing the Islamic display case with female quotes. The leaders of the Muslim community, however, protested this action, arguing that including photographs of women went against their religious beliefs. Thus, all photographs, of both men and women were withdrawn from the Islamic case. Reflecting upon this disappointment, Carnegie admits: "it seemed that our efforts to empower women to promote their faith had backfired."[116] Although Carnegie argues that oral history frees up curatorial voice in the permanent galleries, curatorial intentions ultimately dictate the meaning associated with community testimonials. Community participation, in part, is used to authenticate the actions of curators.

It is essential to the achievement of the institutional mandate that the community be involved in the museum. The community participation incorporated

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[115] Ibid., 75.
[116] Ibid., 75.

into the temporary exhibition space, the Gallery of Religious Life, and the Scottish Galleries ensures that the actions of the museum appear to be endorsed by the religious communities. It would be impossible for the museum to work toward mutual understanding and respect of people of faith if the religious communities in Glasgow were not interested in promoting this end-point. Community groups endorse the activities of the museum by curating shows, providing counsel, and supplying testimonial statements. In exchange, the museum supplies the communities with a valuable venue to voice their own religious perspectives. The willing connection made between community members and the museum's programs strengthens the possibility of the museum achieving its mandate.

Ethnicity and Religion: Defining St Mungo Museum's Communities

While community plays an integral role in authenticating the galleries' narratives, there is an underlying tension at play in the museum because our understanding of who St Mungo Museum's perceived communities are is complicated due to the blurred distinction between ethnicity and religion. J. Milton Yinger qualifies our understanding of ethnic groups by linking three characteristics to them: first, the group perceives itself as being different from other groups, second, other groups view them as being different, and finally, the group participates in common activities centered on shared origin and culture.[117] This difference that Yinger alludes to is clarified by examining the attributes associated with ethnicity. D. Bruce MacKay lists language, location, kinship, custom and religion as the main attributes

[117] J. Milton Yinger, *Ethnicity: Source of Strength? Source of Conflict* (Albany: State of New York Press, 1994), 3.

of ethnicity and describes these as "the sources for an ethnic group's solidarity and longevity."[118] Religion is understood as one of these key attributes, and serves an important role in monitoring and controlling the social behavior of an ethnic group by imposing morality and codes of conduct on the group.[119] The role religion plays in the identity of an ethnic group is of unquestionable importance. In fact, Yinger argues "almost nowhere…can an ethnic order be described and analyzed without reference to a religious factor."[120] Yet, despite religion's link to ethnicity, religion alone cannot determine ethnicity (nor can ethnicity determine religion). Cynthia Enloe argues that religion must operate in conjunction with language, shared territory, and customs.[121] Ethnicity, therefore, is alluded to by an examination of religion, but it is not defined entirely by it; instead, religion works in tandem with language, shared territory, custom, and kinship to clarify and give shape to ethnicity.

The blurring of the boundaries between ethnicity and religion underscores the difficulty that St Mungo Museum has in defining its targeted communities. While religion is the focus of the museum, the other qualifying attributes of ethnicity appear in the museum's discussion of its projects or in its actions. For example, all texts found in the museum appear in English, Punjabi, Urdu, Gaelic, and Mandarin—the most common languages spoken in Glasgow. This inclusion of multiple languages, when viewed with religion and the customs explored in the Gallery of Religious Life arguably speaks to ethnicity. Furthermore, Elizabeth Carnegie discusses the

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[118] D. Bruce MacKay, "Ethnicity," *Guide to the Study of Religion*, Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon, eds (London and New York: Cassell, 2000), 101.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Yinger, 255.
[121] Cynthia Enloe, "Religion and Ethnicity," *Ethnicity*, John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, eds (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996, 197.

temporary exhibition space by describing the participation of both ethnic and religious groups. For example, she references the role taken on by the "local Chinese community" to write texts for *The Chinese Way*, an exhibition curated by Maureen Finn. In the same paragraph, however, Carnegie shifts from ethnicity and categorizes community by religious affiliation, describing the museum's involvement with the Hindu community as it prepared the museum's first community-led temporary exhibition."[122] Carnegie's discussion blurs the differentiation between ethnic and religious affiliation. Does she see these two categories as synonymous, or do the parallels that exist between religion and ethnicity make it difficult for Carnegie to define who St Mungo Museum's communities are? Again, the blurring of these categories is witnessed in the Gallery of Religious Life where thematic cases group together ritual objects of many faiths. Although the premise of these cases is to compare objects of different religions to expound upon similarities between religious groups, the text labels describing objects sometimes use ethnic categories and not religious ones. This is evident in the Birth display case where a lucky sword—an object used to ward away evil spirits—is described as a gift given male babies in China. Thus, the sword is qualified not by religious affiliation, but rather by its association with Chinese culture. Mark O'Neill, who suggested that this museum would allow curators to "combat racism, by showing some of the glories of the cultures of the city's ethnic minorities in a world context," reiterates this complication

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[122] Carnegie, 76.

of terms.[123] By using the term racism, O'Neill has extended the museum's community beyond those of religious communities, to ethnicities and race.

It is difficult not to blur the boundaries between faith and ethnicity in this museum of religion because ethnic association often hinders religious tolerance. As Glasgow increasingly witnesses immigration to the city, the traditional conception of Scottish identity is challenged by the influx of global culture. Whereas historically the main religious tension in Glasgow was sectarian, it is now augmented by multi-faith angst in the city. While St Mungo Museum hopes to help eradicate this anxiety through narratives promoting tolerance and by challenging visitors to see religious faiths as sharing many beliefs and practices, this aim is constricted by the fears ethnic groups hold because of their concern of loss of identity. Thus they cling to their religious beliefs.[124] By focusing on religion, however, the museum has simplified its approach to combating racial tension in Glasgow and has increased the opportunities for community members to have a voice in the museum.

It is because of the religious theme of the museum that faith groups are seen as the museum's primary communities. By focusing on community groups in the museum, the museum provides Glaswegians with opportunities to speak on behalf of their religious beliefs and claim ownership for this museum. As Carnegie writes:

> ...by being open to the community and by working with groups on temporary exhibitions we hope that the public will continue to feel that this is their

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[123] Mark O'Neill, "Exploring the Meaning of Life: the St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art." *Museums International* (Unesco, Paris) 47 no. 185 (November 1, 1995): 50.

[124] D. Bruce MacKay describes the importance of ethnic groups maintaining their homeostasis when a change, like immigration, takes place. Because of lost common land, people emigrating tend to cling to the remaining characteristics of their ethnic group, such as religion and language, to maintain their identity with their ethnicity. See pages 105-107. See also Steve Bruce's comments cited in *Religion in Modern Times: An Interpretive Anthology*, Linda Woodhead and Paul Heelas, eds, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, Ltd: 2000), 288-289.

> museum. The oral history, visitors' comments and community-led exhibitions are vital to that sense of ownership.[125]

Carnegie's statement reveals the museum's ambivalence to the term community. Arguably, the participation of religious groups is central to the integrity of the narratives of the museum. Yet, while community is provided an opportunity to showcase beliefs in the temporary exhibition space, and are invited to share the tenets of their faith at museum events, these religious communities are also meant to think about and respond to the museum's mandate. Because of religious groups' ties to ethnicity and race they are expected to consider their attitudes towards other people of faith. By targeting religious groups as one of their primary communities, the curators have loosely associated their efforts to tackling ethnic intolerance. To fulfill the museum's institutional goals, it is imperative that the museum be succinct in describing who they see as their communities.

While St Mungo Museum has worked diligently to ensure that all faith groups in Glasgow be included in the museum, either by representation through material objects, or by inclusion through testimonials and temporary exhibitions, a vital community has been overlooked by the institution's programming. While its mandate challenges visitors to work toward mutual understanding and respect for people of faith and those of none, the museum has neglected to address people of no faith in its programming. Agnostic and atheistic beliefs are ignored by the emphasis placed on people *of* faith represented by material objects and ritual practice. This omission is ironic, since museums of atheism and anti-religion appeared prior to St Mungo Museum, such was the case with the Kazan Cathedral which was turned into the

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[125] Carnegie, 77.

Museum of Atheism by the Soviet State in 1932. Only after the fall of the Soviet Union was this institution changed into the Museum of the History of Religion.[126] The omission of atheism and agnosticism suggests that curators are not interested in educating its public about people of no faith, and instead target their efforts on promoting respect for world faiths. However, while people of no faith are not integrated into the museum's programming, they still need to be a target audience of the museum. While the museum encourages people of faith to respect the religious beliefs of others, it also challenges people of no faith to show consideration for those who do adhere to religious beliefs.

Conclusion

The museum's role as advocate of religious tolerance and promoter of mutual understanding and respect of people of faith is witnessed in the way community is integrated into the museum. The connection St Mungo Museum has with its communities facilitates religious discussion, and actively integrates people of faith into the programming of the museum. Through this action, religious believers are brought directly into the religious discussions of the museum, and are given the opportunity to speak openly about their experiences of faith. Through this process, museum visitors are able to contemplate the testimonials and arguments made by Glaswegians who actively pursue faith. By peopling the museum, the curatorial team at St Mungo Museum have integrated first-hand experiences of faith, and have taken the exploration of faith beyond an object-directed focus to one that becomes more

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[126] Crispin Paine, "Museums and Religion," *Encyclopedia of Religion*, Second Edition (Farmington Hills: MacMillan Reference, 2005).

dynamic in its inclusion of the intangible qualities of belief. This step is integral to the achievement of St Mungo Museum's mandate, which challenges visitors to look beyond their own faiths in an attempt to understand and respect other beliefs. Through this mandate, curators hope to change Glasgow into a city with greater religious tolerance. The community involvement in this museum is the first step needed to developing this aim. Through community participation, visitors learn more about other Glaswegians, the participants learn more about themselves and take claim for their beliefs in the diverse religious climate of Glasgow, and are also challenged to think about religious pluralism. Furthermore, community involvement endorses the activities of the museum. By including people of many faiths in the permanent galleries, curators convince visitors that the greater Glaswegian religious community supports the museum's actions. By locating community groups in time and place, the museum assists these groups in understanding themselves and facilitates a focus for developing their future. This step plays an important role in releasing the apprehensions of community groups who feel threatened in their recent arrival to the city and those of longstanding tradition in Glasgow who feel endangered by the arrival of people of new faiths and ethnicities. Finally, the integration of the larger Glaswegian community in St Mungo Museum facilitates the museum's achievement of its mandate. The attendance of Glaswegians to lectures and special events increases citizens' knowledge of religion by establishing connections with people of other faiths and by highlighting the similarities found between religious believers. With this increased education, the museum is equipped to promote understanding and respect, and therefore begin the process of changing people's attitudes about religion.

Conclusion: Crafting Meaning at St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art

In this thesis I have argued that St Mungo Museum's unique position as the first public museum of religion provides a valuable case study to investigate the meaning given objects through display. I have claimed that curators use display, and subsequently the meanings emerging from the exhibition of objects, to create narratives. These narratives guide visitors as they move around the museum and point them towards the institution's greater purpose. I have demonstrated that the visible meaning of religious objects in St Mungo Museum is crafted by the methods used to display them—affecting the way visitors perceive these objects as ritual objects or aesthetic treasures. Furthermore, I have argued that the narratives emerging from the display at St Mungo Museum point visitors in the direction of the institutional mandate, a step vital to the achievement of this lofty goal. Through this analysis we see how institutions shape the messages produced in museums in attempt to satisfy larger objectives. Whereas the museums of the Enlightenment were crafted to promote ideals of nationhood, we see that St Mungo Museum's rhetoric requests greater understanding and respect for people of faith. The religious nature of St Mungo Museum has allowed us to focus upon the role that this context plays in understanding objects. In this case, we realize that a museum of religion is complicated by the sacred nature attributed to these works by people of faith. The understood secular environment of the museum is at tension with the active presence of people of faith in the museum. In this vein, I have argued that this museum's focus, as a museum of 'religious life and art' has necessitated active participation

with its communities. To understand the role religion plays in daily life demands that people of faith engage in dialogues with the museum.

Objects are central to the narrative woven into the Gallery of Religious Art, using these artworks to demonstrate to visitors that many faith groups produce religious art in response to their faith. This object-directed space does not need the first person contact that is found in the other galleries because the narrative is produced by displaying the object in a way that heightens its autonomy. Arguably, the religious function is still evident in the visitors' reading of the object, despite the emphasis placed on its aesthetic value. This is especially visible in works associated with Eastern religion. In part, curators have highlighted the religious function because of demands made by the producing culture, but also because these religious works need to be explained to western viewers. Most importantly, however, the narrative created by emphasizing both religious and aesthetic values in this gallery space contributes to visitors' understanding of religious artworks in both aesthetic and religious terms. Both meanings are emphasized to educate visitors that religious groups are similar in their desire to create beautiful objects to assist them in worship and in response to spiritual encounters. Religious artworks, therefore, are used to bring people together, demonstrating that people of faith are not as different from each other as they are perceived to be. A secondary issue emerges because of the way religious objects are displayed. Often, the presentation of these religious objects references the sacred contexts, and thereby confuses the secular reading of these works. The context of the secular museum environment is complicated at St Mungo

Museum by the theme of religion imposed by the topic of this museum: to many visitors these objects are sacred, despite their location in a museum.

In contrast, an object-directed visit to the Gallery of Religious Life is problematic to its narrative. In this gallery, curators examine ritual practices in an effort to demonstrate how religious believers respond in similar ritual ways to the challenges and joys emerging from the stages of human life. Although objects figure strongly in this gallery, and are organized around thematic topics relating to the human life cycle, the intangible nature of religious belief cannot be sustained by an examination of objects alone. Thus, people are incorporated into the displays, to demonstrate how religion creates meaning in daily life. Testimonials, handset interviews, and photographs are used to link people with the material objects used to represent ritual. In this manner, curators present ritual objects as evidence of religious belief.

Community participation, therefore, becomes increasingly necessary for the advancement of the narrative set out in the Gallery of Religious Life and for the achievement of the museum's mandate. Curators are not satisfied by a passive exploration of material culture in a way to understand how religious groups participate in ritual. Instead, curators investigate how religion gives purpose to daily living. This connection to people necessitates that religious believers actively participate in the museum in an effort to animate the religious objects and connect them to life. Communities are thus used to endorse the activities of the museum, connect with objects, and they are also invited to speak to their own beliefs. This

latter convention allows community members to claim ownership for this museum space, and to share their own beliefs with people.

The efforts of curators to emphasize religious and aesthetic meaning, to understand how ritual is a shared response to daily living, and to include community in its programming is vital to the rhetoric underpinning the museum. The goal of St Mungo Museum is to foster greater understanding and respect among people of faith and those of none; therefore, it is essential that people connect with the galleries' material objects in a way that challenges them to rethink their own behaviors and attitudes. By highlighting how religions are similar, the curatorial team attempts to break down the preconceived ideas of difference that act as barriers between religious groups and create tension among people. It is necessary that the museum's communities be integrated into this process because it is these communities who need to rethink their own behaviors and attitudes. Thus, the communities assist the museum in achieving its mandate because of the authenticity they shed on the museum's displays, but their involvement with the museum also facilitates interaction with the material, and in turn, contributes towards assisting the museum in its institutional goals.

The overarching theme of religion creates an interesting tension in the museum. Every aspect of the museum's exhibitions relates to religion—objects are displayed to emphasize religious meaning, while community members are invited to speak to religious belief. Yet, despite this strong grounding in religion, St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art is a museum and not a religious place. Thus, while objects speak to religion, they are not intended to actively function as religious

objects. These objects are infused with sacred meaning, yet this sacred meaning is not the meaning emphasized by curators. Visitors, however, react to these sacred objects from their own experiences, and their reactions to objects is outside the direction implied by the museum's curatorial team. The response is witnessed in the attack on the Shiva As Nataraja, or in the form of prayer and meditation before religious works. While these spiritual experiences arise in St Mungo Museum, the museum is grounded in the secular history of the museum as an institution. Yet despite this distinction, curators felt it necessary to post a sign in the foyer of the museum reading: "[t]he objects on display are sacred to believers, and are treated with respect. However, this is not a religious place, but a museum." This sign reminds visitors that the mandate of the museum is itself not grounded within religious belief, but rather, is focused on people's behaviors and attitudes. The museum desires that visitors engage with material in an attempt to transform their thinking but not their souls. Though St Mungo Museum is contextualized by religion, it is a museum, and therefore a secular institution: it hopes that its visitors experience liminality, and achieve enlightenment as the ritual end-point. St Mungo Museum desires that visitors learn to respect Glaswegians of faith and religious believers worldwide.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: The Text Panels for the Gallery of Religious Art's Buddha Statues

1). A popular image of the Buddha, in which he is shown 'calling the earth to witness.'

Many images of the Buddha, Sidharta Gautama, show him like this, as a simple monk. The serene expression on the face of this Burmese statue reflects the Buddha's approach to nirvana, the release of his individual soul from the cycle of reincarnation and its progress into a blissful state.

The pose of this Buddha, seated on a plain lotus throne making the symbolic gesture (mudra) of 'call the earth to witness,' is one of the most popular. It refers to an event in his life just before his enlightenment. He was asked to name anyone who would give evidence that he had given alms. He moved his right hand, touched the ground, and said that the earth would bear witness that, in a previous existence he had given so much in the form of alms that the earth had quaked.

This extremely light, hollow image is made of thayo (dry lacquer) a technique similar to papier mache. A mixture of sawdust and raw lacquer in liquid form is molded over a clay or wooden core, probably using a barrier layer of cloth. The technique originated in China, but became popular with part-time craftsmen, who were also farmers, in a number of small villages in Upper Burma during the late 18th and 19th centuries.

2). This marble image of the Buddha as a monk came from a Burmese temple and probably dates from the 18th century CE.

A common feature of all representations of the Buddha is the *ushnisa* or wisdom bump on the top of his head. This is one of the 32 bodily signs of a 'superman' or mahapurusha. The elongated ears and the style of hair are also significant symbols. The Buddha is seated on a meditation throne decorated with the symbol of the lotus flower.

In the early years of Buddhism, the Buddha was not depicted in art or sculpture. Instead he was represented by various symbols including the wheel, his footprints, the stupa (a sacred monument built to hold relics of the Buddha) and the tree of enlightenment. The earliest images of the Buddha date from the 2nd century CE in northern India. As Buddhism spread throughout Asia and the Far East, the image of the Buddha began to reflect the different cultural and artistic styles of the regions where the religion flourished.

Appendix 2: Glasgow Forum of Faiths Document

GLASGOW FORUM OF FAITHS
Declaration

The current world situation has exposed the fragility of inter-faith relations and the need for an initiative that helps faith communities to listen and build relationships with each other. There is also an urgent need to show the general public that religion should not be a source of strife and that inter-faith activity is worthwhile.

The Forum of Faiths will bring together civic authorities and the leaders of the main faith communities who have subscribed to this Declaration, to work together for mutual understanding and the good of the City of Glasgow. We hope the Forum of Faiths will contribute to a better understanding of shared religious values.

The Forum of Faiths will

a) work towards a framework within which faith communities can offer help and support to each other

b) bring together leading members of constituent faith communities to discuss issues of common concern

c) support and encourage events of a multi-faith and multi-cultural nature.

The Aims of this initiative are:

a) to promote mutual understanding of the teachings, traditions and practices of different faith communities in the Glasgow area including an awareness of their common ground and a respect for their distinctive features

b) to recognise the problems experienced in the practice of any faith within the local community and to work together for their solution

c) to work for harmony and peaceful co-existence and to promote dialogue and friendship between people of different faiths

d) to oppose prejudice wherever it exists in the local community

e) to work with faith groups and other inter-faith organisations for shared religious values within civic society.

Subscribed: For the City of Glasgow
For the faith communities:
Baha'i
Buddhist
Christian denominations: Church of Scotland
Roman Catholic
Scottish Episcopal
Hindu
Jewish
Muslim
Sikh

For Strathclyde Police

www.glasgow.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/ 41171B70-1CFD-4B61-80B8-2A2678B67671/0/GFFdeclarationrtf.doc

Appendix 3: Handset testimonials from the Gallery of Religious Life

Station 1: Birth-the Coming of Age (183 seconds)

Speaker	Quotation	Duration
Subash Singh Pall	Is she not equal. Never mind equal she is greater, because she is the being, that the superior being has selected to give birth to man. Where would you be without woman so therefore she is more if anything than equal.	18 sec
Cwti Green (Christian)	I try to get away from the idea of God as male or female although sometimes I've compensated and thought of God as a mother, and actually prayed to God as mother to try and redress the balance.	14 sec
John Bell (Protestant)	If you are in an era where the role of women is to be subservient then the tendency will be to depict in Mary that which is not there. This is a woman who had a boy. This is a woman who didnae conk out when an angel appeared in her bedroom. Now this is a woman who sang about God's justice and how the kind of folk who thought they were the bee's knees were going to be pulled down and how the lowly were going to be lifted up. That kind of woman I always imagine now as having big hips and you know being able to laugh. You know one of those women who'd just throw her head back and have a good laugh and who would take on any kind of folk who tried to make out she could be meddled with.	51 seconds

Station 2: Childhood and Initiation (186 sec).

Speaker	Quotation	Duration
Philomena Malik (Islam)	I was born in the Protestant faith. When I was born I was christened by a Catholic doctor. I imagine because my name is Philomena. Now that is a Catholic saints name, and eh, the interesting thing is I've met very few Philomena's in my lifetime and I asked one of my relations and she said, well why don't you ask your mother about it and she said well when you were born you were going to die so they wanted to christen you before you died. Hence you were given the name Philomena so I assume it was a doctor since it was a Catholic name.	42 sec

Madeline (Buddhist)	Children will be named. If you have a child and you want a ceremony to name that child an older member will conduct that ceremony for you but its not, within this movement, its not like a christening or anything.	18 sec
Mr Malik (Islam)	Naturally you will bring up your children in your own faith because you think that its better for them. Even though I never felt for the duty as a Muslim, I brought them in good faith because I am not such a good Muslim but my children are better Muslims than I am.	23 sec
Philomena Malik (Muslim)	There's no point of our children dying and they to heaven and God says, well why are you a Muslim and they turn round and say because my parents were Muslim. Because its not what the parents are its what you yourself are. They have to believe in for themselves its no use us forcing it on them.	30 sec
Bhala Bhadra Das	My daughter kept disappearing and we wondered well where is she and someone told on her and we went into the loft and all the chocolates and chocolate biscuits that had ever been donated were tested. So I had to ask her well did you like the chocolates? First of all big eyed and white. What chocolates? You know the chocolates I'm talking about. Do you mean the ones in the loft? Yes. Did you check them out? No. Did they taste good? Yes. You have to say well we don't do that. You know that. Yeah, I know. Some of the other kids they eat chocolate and I've had chocolate and its nice. When they're out of sight what can you do you know.	55 sec
Mr Sagoo (Sihk)	We actually have more trust in our parents than the children have now. We always found the parents are the best judge. They are the people who will do everything good for us. And so I believe in this world there is no parent who will do something wrong for our children.	18 sec.

Station 3: Sex and Marriage

Speaker	**Quotation**	**Duration**
Sarinder	If a boy from one caste meets a girl from another caste, their families are going to fight. They're not going to say go ahead and do it. But then again that's them bending the rules of their own religion. A lot of people would not like me saying that, but that is my opinion. They're bending the rules of their own religion. Their religion tells you	18 sec

	there is no caste.	
Hindu	No parent wants to harm their children. What they will do, they will do their best. What is good for the children. Before they arrange marriages they go through all the things. They look at the other side, how they are doing. How the family is. All the family. Find out, try to find out everything. Nowadays it has become a custom, just people say there are arranged marriages. Nowadays there is no arranged marriage. They get the consent of the daughter or the boy, whoever that is, before they every [sic] for arranged marriages.	50 sec
Subash Singh Pall	The boy and the girl should be allowed to meet. Its all nonsense that they say they're not supposed to meet. You know the mums and dad get a chance to vet the backgrounds of both children and say well are these people compatible. We can let them meet. I mean mums and dads can be a marriage bureau. You don't have to go to a marriage bureau.	25 sec
Rossana Butal (Islam)	For the ones, that their parents have chosen someone and that the girl, just say doesn't like the person. She doesn't have to marry him, you know. It's totally her choice.	9 sec
Lise Freidman (Judaism)	Well I had, had opportunities but first of all one of my priorities was to find someone who would share my religious views and whose views and not views applied, views of observance of Judaism would be similar to mine because I feel it is an important factor particularly in marriage as one hopes it would involve children.	37 sec
Salvajote (Buddhist)	I've had a relationship for eight or nine years with the same woman and I think in some ways if I wasn't a Buddhist it wouldn't have lasted because I was pretty wild before I became a Buddhist.	9 sec
Philomena Malik (Islam)	I've had no regrets. I found him to be a very good husband, excellent father and I've no complaints whatsoever. We're what, 38 years married, so it's a long time.	14 sec
Asma Shaikh (Islam)	If a couple cannot get on in any way and they have tried their utmost. It not like any easy exit. If they absolutely tried their utmost to get along and still they cannot then divorce is a last resort.	15 sec

*From a transcribed copy of these testimonials given to me May 2005.